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Valentine Strange.

A Story of the Primrose Way.

BY DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

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George Munro
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VALENTINE STRANGE.

A STORY OF THE PRIMROSE WAY.

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

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VALENTINE STRANGE.

CHAPTER I.

HIRAM SEARCH.

A DUSTY, hilly road wound up and down, here in broad light, there in deep shadow. It was a sweltering English summer day, and there was no wind; but a dry quiver was in the air at times, as though the parched earth panted. The birds chirped in feeble enjoyment of the drowsy heat, and the grasshopper shrilled incessantly from cool and tangled grasses. A lame traveler came toiling up a stiffish slope in the lane, bearing a bundle on his shoulder. The bundle, which was bare and scanty, was slung on a walking-stick with a crook at the end of it. Arrived at the top of the slope, the lame traveler sat down in shadow on a smooth table of rock which cropped out beneath an elder-bush. He was lank in build, and sallow in complexion. His nose and his beard were each long and pointed, his cheek-bones were prominent, his cheeks sunken, and his eyes as bright as a hawk's. The stone on which he sat was in an English lane, and a true English landscape smiled and dozed around him; but he, though dressed in a commonplace English costume, was evidently foreign to the scene. In age he might have been anything from five-and-twenty to five-and-thirty.

The seat he had taken being a low one, and his figure tall and gaunt, his knees were ungracefully prominent. He sat in an attitude of great fatigue, his head drooping, and his arms hanging loose at his sides. After a time, he shook off this broken look, and began to explore his waistcoat pockets with an aspect of anxiety. A smile crossed his features; and between finger and thumb he drew out a very little bit of twist tobacco. This he shredded with an enormous pocket-knife, and packed carefully into the bowl of a well-blacked clay pipe. Then, with a renewed look of anxiety,

he made another search in his waistcoat pockets; and again he smiled as he drew forth a single lucifer-match. Balancing this between his finger and thumb, and regarding it as though it were in some sort a curiosity, he opened his lips and broke into speech.

"I dew not think," he said, in slow distinct and nasal tones, "as there was ever anybody in my fam'ly as was gifted with mi-racklous powers. The professed spiritualist is not an animal I feel called upon to admire. But if I am not an unwillin' medium, there never was, an' never will be, sech a phenomenon on the face of the universal globe. There ain't a breath of air stirrin' at this minute; but this is the last lucifer-match I have, an' I've on'y got to strike it to raise some gentle zephyr that'll just come round the one corner that ain't guarded an' blow it out. Now, that's a remarkable fact, an' illustraytive of my general luck. An' if anybody was to be here, an' I was to bet on the zephyr, the atmosphere would lie in dead stillness till this match had burned clean through, an' then most likely it'd blow a tornado just to rile me." He spoke with a look and voice of weary gravity. "This old country ain't so thick crowded as I used to fancy; or if it is, it's my luck that drives the people off any road I happen to be travelin'. If this lucifer don't strike, or if it blows out, or the pipe won't draw, I sha'n't see a human creetur' for ten mile. If by any chance I get a light, I shall prob'ly find a boxful on the road, immediately after. Ay, ay. Things re'ly air contrairy."

He made grimly elaborate preparations for lighting the match. He took off his broad-brimmed felt hat, laid it above his knees, and drew himself back upon the stone until the hat and his legs made a little cave of safety for the lucifer. Then he rubbed the end of the match gently on a bit of roughened stone, and smiled to see the flame. He gave an anticipatory pull at his pipe, smiled again, bent above the light, and pulled gently till flame and tobacco just kissed each other. Then came disaster.

If the weary traveler had turned his head, he might have seen through the parted boughs of the elder-bush a sun-tanned healthy face with a pair of honest gray eyes alive with fun. A young man clad in a suit of dark tweed lay with his elbows on the grass, with his chin supported on his hands. The band of his hat was stuck full of flies, and a

disjointed fishing rod lay on the grass beside him. The strap of his creel pulling tightly at his shoulder, seemed to indicate prosperity in sport. Close to his sun-tanned cheek were the hairy face, black muzzle, and glittering eye of a broken-haired terrier. The dog's hind-legs quivered with readiness to obey an expected order, and his black nose wrinkled and his eyes glittered as if he understood the coming mischief. At the critical second recorded, the young man slightly raised his head and gave an almost imperceptible wave of the right hand. With a bark and a leap the terrier flew through the hedge, and lighting on the traveler's shoulders for the fraction of a second, bounded over his head, twisted himself round and barked himself backward along the dusty road, recoiling at each explosion like a canine cannon. The traveler dropped the extinguished match and reached out in sudden anger for a stone. Before his hand had secured the missile, he drew it back again. "'Taint no use throwin' stones at Destiny," he said, resignedly. "I might ha' been prepared for it. I'd rather it had been the gentle zephyr, though, because then I might ha' took credit for bein' a prophet. But even that consolation 'd be tew much for a man like me to look for."

The unseen auditor was grave, as if his jest had failed. There was even a slight look of shame upon his face.

"I meant to ha' made that smoke do for dinner," soliloquized the traveler, mournfully. He turned to one side and untied the lean bundle. "Ridicalous small sum of money twopence is, ain't it? An' a ridicalous small amount o' bread an' cheese it buys. Wal, Hiram, you played the prodigal; an' I reckon you'll ha' to come down to the swine-husks yet. Hand 'em in at once; I'm game for 'em. I'm holler enough to be ready to fill up with nigh a'most anythin'. Hello! Air *you* hungry?"

This query was addressed to the dog, who finding himself in safety, had at first sat down to bark in comfort; and now seeing the bundle open, crossed over to the traveler with something of the air of a friend dropping in casually to dine. The man broke off a small—a very small piece of bread and offered it. The terrier walked round it, sniffed at it, winked at it with both eyes, then gravely seating himself in the dust, yawned and looked into space with a mighty pretense of not having seen the proffered bread at all, and

of being there quite accidentally for some altogether different end.

"No," said the traveler, deliberately masticating the rejected morsel; "you air *not* hungry. When you air, you'll know better'n turn your nose up at dry bread. An' I'll tell you what 'tis, my ca-nine friend, I hope you never may be. Hunger's a cruel thing for man or beast to suffer—a real cruel thing it is. If you'd the brains to have the heart, you'd be nigh on cryin' to see a citizen of the Great Republic takin' his last meal with a hundred an' fifty miles afore him, an' blank starvation at the end of it. Goin', are you? Wal, good-bye. I s'pose my conversation's kind o' dull to a prosperous dog like you."

The dog saw what the traveler did not see; he saw his master rise noiselessly behind the hedge and slouch along behind it with wary footsteps; and he followed. The young man shook a warning finger at the terrier; and he, comprehending the sign, went quietly in his master's train. By and by the young man, being out of ear-shot of the lame traveler, began to run; and the dog still kept at his heels. Reaching a stile, the master halted there, and kneeling in the grass, beckoned the dog to him. Then detaching a joint of the fishing-rod from the bundle, he motioned the terrier to take it. "Home, at once!" he said, with a warning finger raised once more. With a wag of the tail, the dog took the slender joint between his teeth and trotted gravely toward a lofty white house which stood upon the slope of a hill a mile away. The dog's master sat down upon the stile, and drawing from his pocket a well-stocked cigar-case, he began to smoke. The cigar-case bore a monogram and a crest; and its owner, though plainly attired, looked like an English gentleman from head to heel. His broad shoulders and deep chest gave indications of physical strength and soundness, and his tanned cheeks were ruddy with health. His face was not remarkably handsome, but he was good-looking enough to pass in a crowd; and his bronzed hand swept now and again over a mustache which gave character and manliness to his countenance. The carriage of the head was perhaps a trifle haughty; but he was an only son, and was accustomed to having his own way. That circumstance may have helped to decide the fashion in which he should carry his head on his shoulders. His figure was almost perfect in its combination of strength

and grace, and there was that exquisitely clean and healthy look about him which is the especial attribute of the well-bred British man. When the lame traveler, having finished his scanty meal, came limping down the lane with the lean bundle still over his shoulder, he caught sight of the figure a hundred yards away, and scanned him with keen eyes.

"Old country," he said to himself voicelessly, "boasts of a likely-lookin' sort o' people. Clean grit all through, some on 'em, an' lots of it, but no lumber. Now, that's a lord o' the sile, I reckon. Looks born to order other folks around while he slides along easy." Then he caught sight of the cigar. "Guess I'll come on him for a light," he said; and his lank hand sought the pocket in which his pipe reposed. "No," he continued in an irresolute voice; "can't ventur' on that bit o' consolation yet. I shall ha' to keep that for supper; but I may as well get a light, though." He limped on with one gaunt arm jerking at his side, and with his scanty bundle held on the crooked stick over his shoulder. "No," he said again as he drew nearer; "I can't afford to have the weight of a fusee on my mind for the next three hours; I should have it cryin' out at me every step, an' I should be fightin' not to smoke all the way. I've got to keep that pipe for supper. It's all the supper I shall have, an' that's a fact." Drawing near the stranger he flung him a "Good afternoon," which sounded discourteous and aggressive.

"Good-afternoon," said the stranger in a round cheery voice. "Going on to Brierham?"

"If that's the next town on this road," said the lame traveler, "I'm goin' there."

"Yes," said the young Englishman, rising and walking into the dusty road; "it's the next town."

"Can you tell me how fur 'tis?" asked the traveler.

"About nine miles," returned the other. "If you are willing to earn a few shillings I will ask you to take a note for me."

"I guess," responded the traveler, "I'm game to do a good deal for a half a dollar."

"Hard up?" asked the young man carelessly.

It was not insolently meant; but the other fired at it. He cooled again, or restrained himself, and answered: "I am willin' to sell any service I can render to anybody who can pay me."

"Wait a minute, then," said the stranger; and drawing a note-book from his breast-pocket, he wrote a few lines upon one of its pages, penciling the letters with apparently minute care. Then tearing out the leaf, he folded it, and wrote an address upon it: "Ask for Mr. Valentine Strange at the Manor House. Anybody will direct you. And this will pay you for your trouble." He drew out a purse as he spoke, and made a feint of being disappointed as he looked into it. "I've nothing but gold," he said. "Well, there you are. You don't earn half-a-sovereign so easily every day, I suppose?"

The traveler took the coin, and answered simply: "If you'll say how much of this I am to keep, I'll hand over the balance at the other end."

"Oh," said the other, carelessly, "keep the lot."

"Wal," said the traveler, pocketing the coin with unchanged visage, "I s'pose you can afford it. It's the first wind o' good fortune as has blowed my way for many's a day, an' that's a fact. I can't give you a permanent address to write to just at present; but if ever you happen to be in want of a good turn, you've on'y got to find me, an' I'll spend my last dollar to serve you."

"That's very good of you," said the young Englishman, with a twinkle in his eyes. "You're an American, I think?"

"Yes," said the traveler, drawling on the word; and added "Sir," as though that were an afterthought, not of respect, but of added affirmation.

"There are not many Americans who think it worth while to try their fortunes in the old country."

"No," said the lame traveler, with great dryness. "They *air* a sensible people, *as* a rule."

The other laughed.

"You don't seem to be favorably impressed with England."

"It's fairish," said the traveler, "what there is of it. But I'll say this about your country—mister—it's *the* wust country in the hull globe to be poor in."

"Have you been poor in many countries?" asked the gentleman lightly.

"A few," said the traveler grimly. "It might be—I don't know as it will be—but it might be satisfactory to you to know—"

"You'll deliver the note, won't you?" said the Englishman, half turning away.

"Wait a minute, mister. It might be satisfactory to you to know that you're the man that's turned my fortune. You might like to know it, if you hear o' me again. An' if ever you get in a real corner, you might do worse than ask Providence to furnish a mo-ment'ry interview with Hiram Search. That's me. I ain't a lot to look at; but if ever you're cornered, you ask to see me."

"You are really very good," said the Englishman with a satire too grave for the other's comprehension—"You won't forget the note, will you? Good afternoon."

They parted, and went their separate ways; the Englishman sauntering blithely with rod and well-filled creel; the American limping stolidly under a burden which, pitifully light as it was, seemed almost too heavy for him. A score of times as he went Hiram Search drew out the half-sovereign from his pocket, and having gazed at it, returned it. A hundred times he felt carefully with thumb and finger, to make sure that it had not been spirited away.

"I'll make a stroke with you, my beauty," said Hiram, standing still to contemplate the coin; after which he put the half-sovereign back into his pocket, and went on, with one gaunt leg limping and one gaunt arm jerking until again the desire to realize the possession of good fortune came upon him. Then the coin came out once more, and Hiram stood still to admire it. "It's like the fairy's tent Uncle Josh used to read to us about out of 'Arabian Nights.' You kin pack it in a nutshell, an' it'll spread into board an' lodgin' over a hunderd an' fifty mile. Money's a great idea. Saves kerryin' about a house along with you. It's plaster for a sore foot, an' food to your empty stomach, an' comfort all over. I could fight a wag-in-load of such fellers as I was an hour ago. When I think o' that poor creetur settin' down to his last hunk o' bread a mile or tew back, I feel like a manumitted nigger lookin' at a mean white, an' longin' to kick him out o' pure contempt."

With this jubilant statement Hiram put the coin away finally, and jerked along until, bent nearly double with fatigue and pain, he reached the town, and inquired for the Manor House. It was a mile beyond the town, said the man he questioned. Hiram groaned in spirit; but he

buckled loyally to his task, and went on. Evening was merging slowly into night, but a street lamp shed its rays upon a stone column beside a gate-way, and on the column he read in graven letters "The Manor House." He passed through the gate-way into darkness, and walked painfully along a graveled drive. "To see how lonely an' re-tired the big folks live in this small island," said Hiram contemplatively, "you might think as hull prairies could be had for askin'." The drive was nearly a quarter of a mile in length; but the lame traveler went pluckily along it, and at last halted before a grim-looking old house of dark stone. There was not a light visible; and Hiram searched for the bell-handle in some misgiving lest the place should prove empty. The peal he rang sounded solitary and funereal, but it brought an immediate answer. The footman looked down on Hiram Search and his bundle with one glance of swift disdain and closed the door in his face. Hiram took the bell-handle in his lean fingers and pulled as though he were sounding an alarm of fire.

The footman returned indignant. "Wotter yer a-makin' that row for?" he demanded.

It sounded like a foreign tongue to the American. Hiram looked, and beheld the scoff and scorn of his own people—a flunky. He had never before seen one so near at hand. The footman was a gorgeous creature, crimson-plush and silk stocking as to his lower-man, sky-blue and white-powdered in his higher parts. He planted a trim shoe, with a bulbous ankle and a slim calf above it, on the door-step, and surveyed the poor traveler with an ineffable lordly disdain.

"When you re-quire to know what a man wants," said Hiram gravely, "it's a roundabout way to shut the door on him. You should find out first, an' shut the door after."

"I can't stend 'eah all night," returned the footman with such an assumption of the fine-gentleman accent as he could compass. "Wottoh yar want?"

"Young man," said Hiram severely, "your clothes air tew many for you. You are not Lord-Justice an' Chief Gold-stick in Waitin'—yet."

"Wotter yer want?" cried the footman, angrily relapsing into the tone of his native Hammersmith.

"I dew not want a po-lite male help," returned Hiram

with aggravating slowness of nasal delivery; "an' when I dew—if ever I dew—this is not the store I shall apply at." The footman gazed into the darkness over Hiram's head, and stood there as if impervious to the sharpest shaft of satire. "Take that into your master, you—you gilded menial!" quoth the lame traveler, as he produced the note.

"Hany hanswer?" asked the gilded menial with sublime contempt. He hoped inwardly that this queer person might be a begging-letter-writer, and that it might be his own happy lot to see him off the premises.

"Ask your master, you po-matumed slave!" returned the messenger. Hiram's republican gorge rose at the mere notion of a flunky. He knew that there was no great probability of an answer being intrusted to his keeping; but it was something for the free citizen of an enlightened republic to triumph over this remnant of the enslaved ages in a darkened monarchical realm, even so far as to make him come to the door again.

"Wait there," said the footman, in his lordliest tones. He made as if to close the door; but the lame traveler thrust in his bundle.

"Shut that door again afore you've done my arrand, you poor clothes-hoss," said Hiram, "an' I'll ring the bell off the handle."

"Hoskins," said a voice from the hall, "what's the matter there?"

"Pusson with a note, sir," said the footman, with a sudden change of tone.

Hiram looked round the figure of the footman, and saw standing in the hall a gentleman who carried a billiard-cue in his hand. He had discarded coat and waistcoat, and stood in a spotless white shirt, with one brilliant stud sparkling in the breast of it. Close-cut, well-groomed hair, with a reddish tinge in it; eyebrows and mustache a shade darker; forehead high and smooth; outline of the face an almost perfect oval. Eyes large, dark-gray, and luminous. Nose, mouth, and chin a trifle womanish, but finely modeled. These details the lame traveler's hawk-like eyes took in at a single glance.

"Gentleman," said Hiram to himself. "British breed. Strength, delicacy, an' stayin' power." These criticisms related to physique only. Hiram made no pretense to an ability to read character in that off-hand fashion; but he

was an intense and therefore a ready admirer of British physical development.

"Pusson with a note, sir," said the footman.

"For whom?" asked the gentleman.

"Valentine Strange, Es-quire," said Hiram from the darkness.

"Come in," said the gentleman; and Hiram entered, limping and jerking in his gait, dusty and worn out with travel. "Where is the note? Who sends it?"

"Your po-lite menial has the note," slinging his bundle to his shoulder again.

The footman had hastily seized a salver and placed the little missive upon it.

The gentleman took the note, opened it, surveyed Hiram Search the while, then read it a little slowly and with a puzzled look. Having read it, he glanced at Hiram with an inquiring smile, glanced through the note again, and looked once more at Hiram. The note was in English, but written in Greek characters, and ran thus:

"DEAR VAL.,—I have nothing to say; but I wanted to give the queer fish who carries this something to do to excuse charity. Let me know if you receive it. Yours,

"GERARD LUMBY."

"Come this way," said Valentine Search; and Hiram, limping and jerking gauntly, followed into a billiard-room. There sat a diminutive man with a bald head, smoking a cigar, which looked too large for him. The diminutive man looked up and glanced from one to the other. Hiram, with his bundle on its stick over his shoulder, returned his regard. The diminutive man had a merry face, which looked at once old and young. Either he was not yet old enough to have grown a beard or was clean shaven—a matter not easily decided at a cursory glance. His head shone like a billiard-ball, and below the baldness lay the slightest ring of light hair, which he smoothed with his right hand as he surveyed Hiram, and then looked inquiringly at Strange.

"Where did you get this note?" asked the master of the house.

"Somewheer 'bout five hunderd mile back, countin' by a lame man's measure," responded Hiram. "You might call it ten."

"When did you get it?"

"This afternoon," Hiram answered, "four hours ago."

"You look tired," said his interlocutor.

"Appearances," returned Hiram, "air not always deceptive." His long face was pallid with fatigue and hunger. He could scarcely draw himself upright to assert his manhood.

"Where are you going?"

"London," he answered briefly.

"Were you paid for bringing this note?" Strange asked.

"I was so," returned the messenger.

"What are you? Have you a trade?"

"Compositor, Clerk, Auctioneer, Smith, Builder, Cabinet-maker. I ain't partickler."

"It seems not. You're an American, of course?"

"I am so," said Hiram.

"Well," said Strange, regarding him with a comic seriousness, "this is a very important document indeed. Had it been intrusted to careless hands, I dare scarcely guess what terrible consequences might have come about. You have proved a trusty messenger, and you deserve to be rewarded. There's an extra half crown for you."

Hiram solemnly pouched the coin, and spoke in turn. "Look here, mister. If you don't mind, I want to ask a question. Who wrote that note?"

"Why do you want to know?" asked Strange.

"Wal," said Hiram, shifting his bundle and lifting his lame foot to ease it, "so fur as I know, I ain't superstitious, but I dew believe in luck. The man that wrote that note brought the first streak of luck I've had sence I landed in this country. Now, you've widened the streak—not much; but you've widened it, an' I'm thankful for it. From this out, I'm bound to prosper. Things like this don't happen for nothin', I guess. Now, I want to know the name o' the man that did me this good turn. If it's all the same to you, mister, I should *like* to know it."

"There you are," said Strange, laughing mischievously. He laid the note on the edge of the billiard-table, and pointed with his little finger to the signature, which, like the rest of the brief epistle, was in Greek characters. To his surprise, the gaunt Yankee leaning over it evinced no dismay or wonder, but spelled it out, with a rugged finger following it letter by letter.

"Gerard Lumby," he said quietly to himself, and repeated the name once or twice—"Gerard Lumby. Thank you, mister. I sha'n't forget."

"Ah!" said Strange, still smiling, "you read Greek, do you? Did you master the contents of this important state document by the way?"

"There's your coin, colonel," said Hiram, throwing the half-crown on to the green cloth of the table. His sallow features flushed, and his keen eyes glittered with anger. He drew himself to his full height, and wheeling round, he walked from the room without a limp. "Here, you flunky!" he called out in the hall, "let me out o' this, d'ye hear!"

The majestic Hoskins strolled slowly to the door and opened it.

"You an' your master," said the indignant Hiram, pausing in the door-way, "air a pair."

The flunky smiled, thinking his own wounded honor avenged.

"I was always inclined to wonder, up till now, how it came about that a man an' a Britisher could bear to have such a creatur' as a flunky foolin' round at all. But I guess there's a spice of the flunky in the Britisher himself, when all's told, an' mebbe that's the reason!"

Hoskins slammed the door upon his heels and retired with dignity. Valentine Strange took up the coin from the billiard-cloth, and threw it away at angry random. It passed through the door-way of the room, struck a door opposite, and rolled with a clear silver tinkle down the mosaic floor of the hall. Strange laughed constrainedly.

"I think," said the bald-headed man, removing his cigar to make way for the observation—"I think the Yankee scored."

CHAPTER II.

"THE BLIND BOW-BOY'S BUTT-SHAFT."

On the western coast of England, there is a narrow bay which is bounded on each side by a headland of igneous rock. The smaller and more northerly headland is locally known as Daffin Head; and the larger headland on the southern side of the bay is called Welbeck Head. For some half mile, Welbeck Head runs gently up from the mainland, its grass growing sparser, and its prehistoric old

bones declaring themselves more plainly, until you come upon broken rocks with no other covering than lichen, and then go on by paths which increase in difficulty for another half mile. There, suddenly, you reach a bit of seeming fairy-land—Welbeck Hollow. A carpet of green turf, soft and fine, is belted by trees; and above the topmost branches rise the veritable bones of old earth, lichen-spotted and hoary with rain and sunshine—the rain and sunshine of thousands of years. In the center of the grassy space is one great isolated rock; the tombstone, as the country legends tell, of a beautiful young princess buried there by a cruel magician. The perennial tears of the beautiful princess flow from the southern side of this vast bowlder in a sparkling stream, which brawls inland for a mile, and then returning, ends its brief life in salt water.

Beyond the Hollow, the Head grows precipitate and even terrible. It is tall enough to bathe its hoary forehead now and then in storm, and can push a bare defiant scalp at the very thunders. It rises like a wall on the seaward side, and overhangs a little, as though it threatened to tumble headlong. Nervous tourists keep clear of its edge; and even strong-headed people, tempted to lie prone there and venture one look sheer down to the wrinkled sea, have confessed to something of a thrill of fear.

On its southerly side the Head has neither terrors nor splendors. It slopes quietly to the mainland meadows, and bears on its wide bosom a pleasant park and a quiet country mansion. This quiet country mansion is called "Lumby Hall;" and men, women, and children bearing the name of Lumby have lived there almost from time immemorial. The Lumbys were always a solid household, reverencing the wisdom of our ancestors, and believing blood to be thicker than water. They were a quiet and inoffensive people; but they were known to be hard and implacable in enmity. If you had a Lumby for a friend—all the Lumbys were proud of this, and made it an honorable tradition, to be maintained at all hazards—you had a friend who would stick by you like a brother. But if you had a Lumby for an enemy—the Lumbys were proud of this also, and made an honorable tradition of it—you had to face an enemy not to be appeased or conciliated; a man relentless, unreasoning, who hated you root and branch, you and yours to the ninety-ninth relationship.

The elder Lumby had inherited this nature, and had transmitted it to his son. They both took a pride in it, and were pleased to think that it was English. That was the old Lumby's sacred shibboleth. If the "Standard"—he was a stanch Conservative—told him that a thing was un-English, he voted against it in the House of Commons, in whose collective wisdom he furnished a unit. He liked good old English sports and pastimes; and without having a grain of vulgar cruelty in his nature, he would have welcomed the return of cock-shying, and bull-baiting, simply because those sports were old-fashioned, and had once been popular in this island. He mourned over the gradual evanishment of the good old English penal laws; he drank unwittingly much good old English port. That, he believed, had a continental origin, and it was one of the few things he did not disdain on that account. He was not in the direct line of the good old county house whose name he bore, but had inherited the estates from a childish uncle. The city Lumbys, of whom he was the head, had always been a little despised by the county Lumbys; but the county Lumbys had died out, and the city branch ruled in their stead. Mr. Lumby had gradually released himself from the toils of labor; and though he would not accept the position of a sleeping partner, he had exercised of late years but little supervision over the doings of the firm, and was not much more than its nominal head, except that he drew the lion's share of its profits.

Gerard Lumby the younger, with whom this history has much to do, was cut by nature on the lines of the paternal pattern; but the world being thirty years older when he came into it than it had been at his father's birth, his social and political conservatisms were of a milder type. He walked homeward with the Yankee's odd-sounding name in his mind, and smiled to think of the quaint earnestness with which the fellow had promised help in any day of need. Taking the way by the lane, the youth whistled as he went, out of mere jollity and youth. By and by he was met by an open carriage, drawn by two handsome chestnuts, driven by a fat coachman of rubicund countenance, who wore an exceedingly crisp and curly wig. The lane was so confined, that Gerard had either to retreat, or to mount a bank on side or another. He chose the readier alternative; and laying his disjointed rod on the grass, he

leaped upon the mound, caught a sturdy overhanging ash branch, and waited for the carriage to go by. From this height of vantage, he saw that it had one occupant, a lady, who carried a sunshade, and carried it in such a position that her face was hidden.

Now, Gerard knew, or supposed he knew, everybody who kept a carriage within ten miles; but this equipage was strange to him. A thing of that sort is a matter of interest in the country, and he wondered who the lady might be. She, while yet a dozen yards away, saw from beneath her sunshade one of Gerard's feet swinging clear of the mound, in readiness to drop when the carriage should have passed; and coming out of the pretty silken shelter to see to whom the foot belonged, herself became visible. The average of beauty in these favored islands is high, and Gerard had seen pretty faces in plenty. People who live in the west of England need not travel far to look for feminine charms; but Gerard had never seen anything to approach this new vision. She was charmingly dressed, but somewhat quaintly, and she wore a profusion of lace. So much Gerard could have told you, and no more, for he was as ignorant of millinery as I am. Her face was beautiful, and not with any merely common type of loveliness, but with that soft yet haughty splendor which belongs alone to some few Englishwomen, and is at once loftier and more charming than any form the Greeks have left us. Millais might have painted it, and made himself twice immortal; but no mere marble could have carried more than half its charm.

The lady at a guess might be twenty. Gerard was five-and-twenty. The unknown beauty shot one shaft at him in passing, and sent it barbed with a smile. A queenly little inclination of the head acknowledged the trouble the passing carriage gave him. Off came Gerard's hat in a moment, leaving his crisp curled hair and frank forehead open to the view. With one foot planted on the grassy bank, and the other swinging loose, the strong brown left hand stretched freely out to grasp the bough—the attitude was as graceful as that of Mercury new lighted. The young lady's eyes regarded him with demure admiration for a second, and then she hid herself with her sunshade, and the sun seemed shaded from Gerard's eyes.

It is very natural for a young man of five-and-twenty to

fall in love; and it is in accordance with the decrees of Nature that some of them should do it suddenly, without prescience, premonition, or warning, and indeed in barefaced defiance of all likelihood. The ways of falling in love are as various as the natures of men and women. Some, of the critical, cautious, and unimaginative sort, are inclined to set down love at first sight as a figment of the poet's and the novelist's invention. But there is an actual moment of time—if it could only be caught—at which anything has its beginning; and though I, for one, have not much faith in the raptures of passion which take rise at a single glance, I nevertheless have seen enough of love and lovers to believe that even one glance may slay all chances of bachelorhood and spinsterhood in a pair of youthful lives. Here it was not two but one that fell, and even he did not now begin to guess that he was wounded.

Our youthful Gerard was not much of a hand at the poets and fictionists; and being hit with "the blind bowboy's butt-shaft," took to wondering what was the matter. Had he been given to verse-making, he might have gone home to write a sonnet about his vision, and so have fanned love's little flame into a premature fire, which should have died for want of fuel. As it was, he took up his rod, and sauntered along the lane with the beautiful face before him, not consciously or intentionally recalling it, yet renewing his passing glimpse of it again and again, almost as if by actual sight. The queenly head just bent a little, the lovely face smiling, the violet eyes turned upward, still holding him in sight while the head bowed—My poor Gerard, you are a smitten man. And who amongst us, from whose "topmost head the thickest hazel dies," would not have changed places with you, if it were but for a month or two, an hour or two, a mere five minutes, to be young again, and once again in love?

So Gerard strode home, and the beautiful face bore him company. The broken-haired terrier hailed him with a voice of joy, and careered about him in wild circles; but meeting with no response to outspoken affection followed disconsolately at a distance with his moist tail between his legs. Through the gates, with their crumbling pillars of gray stone bearing the Lumby arms, along the shady avenue, and across the trim-kept lawn, the beautiful face bore Gerard company. He sat down, and smoked a pipe in its

society; but feeling, somehow, a little restless, he arose, and with no definite idea of action, strolled round to the stables.

"Gerard!" cried a pleasant, girlish voice; and the young man turning, saw a pretty sight—a young lady, namely, of some eighteen years, fresh and bright and happy, with a face in which innocence and piquancy charmingly blended.

"Well, Milly?" said Gerard.

"We have had visitors this afternoon whilst you were away," she said. "Guess who they were."

"Who were they?" asked Gerard, languidly, trying to get up a show of interest.

"Guess," she said!

Gerard, with his hands in his pockets, his hat drooping over one eye, and his pipe stuck in one corner of his mouth, looked like a protest against intellectual effort. But he responded gallantly to the challenge: "Val Strange."

"No."

"Then I give it up," said lazy Gerard.

"Guess again."

"Milly," said Gerard, appealingly, "don't you think it's too hot for guesswork? Who was it?"

"Our new neighbors," said Milly, nodding gayly. "Mr. Jolly and his daughter. And, O Gerard, I think she's the most beautiful girl I ever saw! And she wore such lovely lace!—" Gerard flushed a little. "And Mr. Jolly," pursued Milly, with great vivacity, "is a little man with a face like a Normandy pippin—brown and shriveled, you know. And they're going to give a big dinner and a ball, and we're all invited!"

"Great news, eh, Milly?" said Gerard.

"And," said Milly, in breathless pursuit of her theme, "they have such a coachman, Gerard, in such a wig, and a wonderful port-wine face, like an old-fashioned vintner; and I'm sorry you missed them, for they have only been gone an hour."

Gerard had begun to put things together. Yet what had he to blush for? "I met a young lady in a carriage just now," he said; "but she was alone."

"Oh," said Milly, "Mr. Jolly came on horseback. He is an old friend of the Mortons, and has gone to Daffin Head to see the General."

"M—m," said Gerard, blushing again, through all his assumption of indifference. "Carriage I met was a landau.

Pair of chestnuts, very handsome horses. Very fat coachman. Rather a pretty girl inside."

"O Gerard!" cried Milly, "what a shame to call her 'rather pretty.' She's beautiful. I never saw anybody half so lovely, even in a picture."

"Perhaps," said Gerard, making much pretense of cleaning the stem of his pipe with a stalk of grass—"perhaps I saw some other young woman."

"'Young woman' indeed! Why, you know everybody else for miles." Ladies fire those quaint conversational double-shots at times. "And I'm sure if I were a man, I should have fallen in love with her at first sight."

"But, being a young woman," said Gerard, repeating the obnoxious phrase, "your notions of manly conduct are not valuable."

"Perhaps not," said Milly. "But I wish you had been here to meet them."

"I shall see them at the feed," said Gerard, still very busy with his pipe and turning more than half away from Milly. What had he to blush for? It made him almost angry with himself that he should be so foolish.

"All you Oxford men are vulgar," said Milly with decision. "You speak of a dinner as though you were horses. You call a ball a 'hop,' and you talk of money as 'rhino' and the 'stumpy.' I wouldn't talk slang if I were a man."

"But being a young woman," said Gerard, repeating himself, "your notions of manly conduct are not valuable."

"And, oh, Gerard!" exclaimed the young lady, "it's my first ball; and will you practice the *deux temps* with me?"

"As much as you like," said Gerard.

"Thank you," said Milly. "That *is* kind. The ball is this day six weeks; and I am to wear—" Then the young lady drove into millinery detail; and Gerard having conquered the imaginary obstacle in his pipe, recovered composure, and listened with a good-humored smile, understanding nothing.

"And very nice you'll look in it," he said; "and I wish you lots of partners."

"Aunt is going to return the visit this day week," said Milly. "*I* am going as well."

"All right," said Gerard. "I say, Milly! I'm going up to town next week. There are jewelers in town. Who

knows? I might find a bracelet, or a necklace, or a pair of ear-rings, or something of that kind. Eh?"

"O Gerard," cried Milly, "you *are* kind!"

"Not a word about it now," said Gerard in grave badinage. "The governor might stop my allowance if he heard of such extravagance. *Mum's* the word!"

Milly nodded with a grave face and sparkling eyes; and Gerard, with an answering nod of the head, strolled on to the stables. When he was alone again, the beautiful face came back to him, and he sauntered on solemnly, thinking of the coming dinner and the ball, and wondering with a surprising interest whether the young lady would remember him. He was absent-minded and silent through the quiet family dinner that evening, though Cupid's butt-shaft did not yet so rankle in him as to spoil his appetite. His mother, a sedate lady of six-and-forty, large and matronly, with honest gray eyes like Gerard's own, remarked his preoccupied looks; but his appetite appeased her fears. Mr. Lumby senior was nursing his first gout, and was free from the toils of the House of Commons for the remainder of the session. He drank mineral waters at dinner; and though he looked with longing eyes at the decanters and the claret jug, he suppressed himself like a hero. Between Gerard's preoccupation and his sire's grievance at the mineral waters, the table was very silent.

"Father," said Gerard, suddenly, "I think I shall ride over and see Val Strange to-night."

"Why?" asked the elder briefly.

"Rupert is getting a little thick about the legs," said Gerard, referring to his favorite horse. "And it's just the night for a quiet ride. I left a portmanteau and dressing-case there, so that there's no need to take anything with me."

"All right, my lad," said Lumby senior, heartily. "Come back to-morrow."

"Of course," said Gerard; and having kissed his father and mother, he went his way. The good-night kiss in this old-fashioned household was a habit carried on between father and son from Gerard's childhood, and was always followed by a solemn shake-hands. Gerard did not kiss his pretty little second-cousin; though, perhaps you and I might have chosen Milly's lips in preference to those of Lumby senior. But possibly Milly might have resented us.

The blind boy's butt-shaft rankled, though ever so little. That curious longing for solitude, that almost unconscious desire to be alone with fancy, which assails the least imaginative of men under Love's earliest influences, was upon him. He started briskly enough; but Rupert's pace would have overtaken the halting Hiram's steps before the gates of the Manor House were reached; but Gerard had not gone far when he suffered his half-formed dreams to run away with him. The reins dropped loose on the horse's neck. The swift trot became a leisurely walk. The shadows gathered closer, flowing on from the east in dim pursuit of the descending sun, and Gerard was in the narrow lane again, waiting for the carriage to go by, and looking down for one brief second, a thousand times recalled, into a pair of wonderful violet eyes, that smiled and then were hidden.

But at this period of its existence, Love has its impatience, its little bursts of temper, and its sudden longings for swift motion, as well as its liking for dreams. Rupert, not being in his master's confidence, was astonished at the sudden dig of the spur; but after one angry curvet, he laid himself out for speed, and dashed along the level high-road at a rattling pace. He drew rein at the town, and went through its dimly lighted main street at a sufficiently sober pace; but he made Rupert lay himself out again along the stretch of road between town and Manor House, and had so roused the blood of the thorough-bred by this last spin, that he had as much as he could do to hold him in hand when he reached the darkened avenue.

"Look yere!" said a voice from the darkness. "Say which side o' the way you want to hev, an' I'll take the other."

"Is that you again?" asked Gerard, recognizing the voice.

"Good-evenin', Colonel," said Hiram, recognizing Gerard in turn.

"You have delivered the letter? Or are you going now?"

"I hev been thar," said Hiram, reminiscent of Dr. Watts's hymns; "but I can not say I still would go."

"Why not?" said Gerard. "What's the matter?"

"Wal, Colonel," returned Hiram, "Mr. Strange's flunky is a deal too overcooked for my taste."

"What is the matter with him?" asked Gerard.

"If you're going thar," returned Hiram, "you can make inquiries into the natur' of his complaint yourself. An' it's like master like man, up thar, Colonel. I reckon, though, as you're another sort from that kind, an' I wish you good luck, sir, an' piles of it. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Gerard, and he rode on.

Hoskins answered the bell in wrath, being persuaded that the tramp had returned. "Well, *now*, what is it?" he demanded, opening the door and confronting the visitor with an air of lofty scorn. Then beholding Gerard, to whom he was indebted for countless tips, he abased himself inwardly, and made excuses. "I beg your parding, sir," said Hoskins, with much humility, "but there have been a very trying party ringing at the bell, sir, on'y this minute, an' I fancied, sir, as 'ow 'e'd come back again. Beg parding, I'm sure. Mr. Strange is in the billiard-room, sir. Shall I 'old the 'oss, sir? Send him round to the stables? Yes, sir."

Gerard entered the house, and made his way to the billiard-room. "My American friend has been raising a shindy here," he said to himself as he walked up the hall. Strange was making a stroke as Gerard entered the billiard-room, and there was a look, half of vexation and half of comedy, on his face. Hearing Gerard's step, he turned, and met him with a pleasant smile. "Things were quiet at home," said Gerard, "and I felt inclined for a ride. I met my Yankee in the avenue; I suppose he delivered the note? Queer fish, isn't he?"

"Rather," said Strange, looking half vexed again. "Lumby, the man in the arm-chair is Reginald Jolly. Rags, this is Gerard Lumby. You've heard me speak of him often."

"Many a time," said the little man. "We're going to be neighbors, I believe."

"I believe so," said Gerard; and fell to wondering whether this could be the father or the brother of the young lady he had seen in the lane. Then remembering Milly's description of Jolly *père* as a little man with a face like a Normandy pippin—brown and shriveled—he decided that this was not the father. The little man was bald enough to have been a grandfather; but his face was curiously young, and his age was a thing bewilderingly uncertain.

"I like your Yankee, Mr. Lumby," said the bald-headed little man, apparently unconscious of Gerard's scrutiny.

"I don't," said Strange.

"What has he been doing?" asked Gerard. "He doesn't seem to have agreed with Hoskins either."

"Oh," said Strange, lightly, pausing on a stroke, "he did a little high-comedy pretense of wounded feeling, and threw down a half-crown I gave him."

"Pretense!" said the bald-headed man. "Not a bit of it. He was real enough!" Hiram's defender then told the story, with a ludicrously close imitation both of the American and of Strange. "Why should he throw half-crowns away?" asked the narrator. "He hasn't many of 'em, I'll be bound. No, no, Val. The man was hurt, and he let out with a facer. You know he was hurt, Strange, and you're sorry you said it. Come now; you know you are."

"Rubbish," said Strange.

But the little man insisted. "Come now, Strange; you know you are."

"Well, then," said Strange, "I am. Will you have a game, Lumby?"

Gerard consented, and as the game went on, they fell to talk of other matters. It came out incidentally that the bald-headed man had been at Oxford during Gerard's last term there. "He can't be younger than I am," said the puzzled Gerard to himself. He began to fish delicately for an answer to his puzzle. "We had a call this afternoon," he said, "from Mr. Jolly and your—" He paused for the bald-headed man to fill up the blank.

"Granddaughter," said the bald-headed man.

This fairly staggered Gerard. "I was away from home," he began rather helplessly, when Strange broke in with a shout of laughter. The little man smiled with cheerful self-approval, and took a drink.

"How old do you think he is?" cried Strange.

"Treat me respectfully, if you please," said the little man, with an air of dignity. "I am one-and-twenty. I have arrived at man's estate. It's a common fallacy, Mr. Lumby," he continued, rising, and addressing Gerard with much solemnity, "that I am bald. This is not baldness," laying his hand on the top of his shining head. "It is forehead, sir; forehead." Then he sat down again and smiled in renewed self-approval, "The lady," he con-

tinued, "who called this afternoon at Lumby Hall, was my sister Constance."

Gerard went on with the game; and the little man resumed his big cigar. "Constance," said Gerard inwardly. "A pretty name." He liked it so well that he repeated it to himself. He thought the violet eyes looked faithful. "Constance—constancy." What nonsense was this? Why should the face so haunt his memory? Why should the name so cling to him? The three young men sat late together, and Gerard was dull and lively by curious fits and starts. He went to sleep remembering the violet eyes, and he dreamed of them.

CHAPTER III.

"I LIKE THE PRIMROSE WAY," SAID STRANGE.

AFTER breakfast next morning, Strange and his guests were enjoying the day's first cigar.

"I want you two men to come home with me, and let me introduce you to my governor and my sister," said Reginald Jolly.

This invitation jumped with Gerard's desires, and his cheek colored with pleasure, unmarked by his companions. "What do *you* say, Val?" he asked, with as great an assumption of indifference as he could wear.

"I'm very sorry," said Strange, "but I can't come. I didn't tell you of my last bargain, did I, Lumby?"

"No. What is it?"

"I have bought a yacht, a beautiful thing, that sails I don't know how many knots an hour; and I'm going to sail round the world in her 'from China to Peru.' What do you say to coming along, eh?"

"Val's a noble sailor," said Reginald. "To my personal knowledge he has crossed the British Channel several times; and I believe, but I'm not quite certain, that he has been to the Isle of Man."

"Indeed, you depreciatory ruffian! Rotterdam! Antwerp! Lots of places!"

"Yes," said Reginald; "you're a mighty seaman."

"Ah, well," said Strange; "I'm a better sailor than you are."

"I don't believe it," the little man returned. "You

suffered more than I did when we crossed to Calais together last summer."

"Well," said Strange, reclining luxuriously in an arm-chair, and puffing a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling, "I like to face a difficulty. I like to battle with something that gets me down and rolls upon me to begin with. The sea has always beaten me until now, and I'm resolved to become an accomplished seaman."

"He'll provision himself for a year," said Reginald, "and he'll start for Pekin or Pernambuco; and before he has been out a day, he'll feel unwell, and order himself to be put in at the nearest port. I'll wager half-a-crown that he never gets a hundred miles from British shores. I'd offer more, but I can't afford it."

"I am resolved on making a voyage round the world," said Strange, laughing good-humoredly. "Will you come, Gerard?"

"Eh?" said Gerard, waking up, at the sound of his own name, from a dream of the violet eyes.

"You're dull this morning," cried Val, cheerily. "Wake up, man. I'm going on a voyage round the world. Will you come with me?"

"No; thank you," said Gerard; "sailing's dull—duller than I am."

"Thought you'd jump at the chance," said Val. "I know you're a first-rate yachtsman."

"I got tired of it," said Gerard in reply, and lapsed into his day-dream.

"You'll get tired of it too," said Reginald, turning anew upon Strange.

"Don't be too sure of that," he replied. "You only know one side of me. There's a good deal of the Spartan in my constitution. I find hardships pleasant. I like a rough-and-tumble life. I should revel in a campaign."

"You'd pretty soon revel out of it," said the little man, with some disdain. "Call yourself a Spartan, you Sybarite? Rough-and-tumble? Gammon!"

"Pooh!" said Val, a shade less good-humoredly than before. "You don't know me, my good fellow."

"Don't I?" returned the skeptic. "Who went out of training for the College Eight on the very first day, and was caught by me in the act of smoking whilst brewing cider-cup?"

"Very good cup it was, too," said Val, striving to propitiate his critic.

But the little man arose, and stood over him sternly. "Who always went headlong for the Newdegate, and wrote twenty lines, and then chucked it? Who came back from his last lounge in Brussels and—"

"Never mind more instances," said Strange. "I admit them all. I don't care to live line and rule. I don't want to be hampered by restrictions. As for the training, I never believed in the system. I should have pulled as well after a cigar and a glass of cider-cup, as I could have done without them." He laughed with renewed good-humor. "But you must needs come prowling round, like the tyrannical dwarf you are, to see what I was doing. It was you who ordered me out of training, not I who went out of it."

"I ordered you out of the boat," said the little man, still standing over him. "A precious cosun I should have been, if I hadn't."

"I don't believe in training," said Strange, with much decision. "We overdo it, and go stale."

"*You* never overdid it," said his late coxswain severely. "You are an idler by nature, plus circumstance. You are disgustingly rich, and that fact fosters your natural proneness to self-indulgence. You wallow in gold and purple and fine linen. Your feet are set forever in the Primrose Way."

"I like the Primrose way," said Strange. "I am fond of primroses."

"'Many there be,'" quoted the coxswain with an unbending air, 'who go the Primrose Way to—'"

"Say the workhouse," pleaded Val, languidly, "*I* know! Regy, my boy, you're perpetually preaching. You're too energetic and too shamelessly and outspokenly good, for me. Now, look at me. I am athletic by stealth, and blush to find it fame. I cover up my good works. I don't brag of them."

"You are a lotus-eater and a Sybarite," said the little man severely. "And you crown your offenses with a crown of aggravation, when you come and crow over a hardy son of the soil like me, and call yourself a Spartan."

"I *am* a Spartan," said Strange lightly. "I'll do this voyage and something more."

"Who is going with you?" asked Gerard, waking up again.

"Gilbert. You remember Gilbert at Oriel? First-rate man for the commissariat."

"Ah," said Reginald, relighting his cigar, and looking round at Strange with an expression most comically like that of a parrot bent on mischief: "he's another Sybarite. Wanted to train on truffles and Heidsieck's monopole!"

"Did he?" said Strange, laughing. "The good old Billy. It was like him. Well, he has the complete control of the commissariat department, and *carte-blanche* to lay in what he likes. He has found a wonderful cook, a sort of nautical Soyer; and he's invented a capital wine case to swing on— I forget what the things are called; but the wine doesn't get shaken in any sort of weather."

"It's a very Spartan sort of expedition altogether," said the critic. "I hope you've a piano on board!"

"Of course," said Strange. "A crate of books. Cards, backgammon, chess, everything in that way we could think of. Because, you see," he continued, with a chastened air, "there's a good deal of tedium in living on board a yacht; and since I am rather a man of action than otherwise, I'm likely to find it dull."

"Poor Spartan!" said Reginald, with a comic, crackling laugh.

"There is no form of humor so cheap as the catchword," said Val, sententiously. Then the two laughed together, and Gerard came out of a new day-dream.

"I suppose," said Gerard, "you remember that you were engaged to run up to town with me next week?"

"No. Am I?" asked Val, sitting up with an air of apology. "So I am. I'm really sorry, Lumby; but I'm afraid I can't keep Gilbert waiting. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Gerard, a little ungraciously.

"I'll write, and put Gilbert off for a week, if you like?" said Val, with a penitent look.

"No," said Gerard, heartily, forgetting his momentary pique. "Don't do anything of the sort, for me. I don't know that I've any special reason for going, after all."

"It's curious," said Strange, sinking back into his armchair again—"it's very curious that I should have forgotten

that engagement. If there's a thing I'm careful to do it is to remember an engagement."

At this moment Hoskins entered with a telegram, which he handed to his master. "Excuse me," said Strange; and opening the missive, he laid down his cigar, and read it.

"Dear me," he said, rising. "Here's poor Gilbert wiring to me to say that we made arrangements to sail yesterday. I thought it was Thursday; and the day turns out to have been Tuesday. I was going down this afternoon to join him. Well now," turning upon the gleeful Reginald, who was chuckling at this practical illustration. "What is there to laugh at?"

"Nothing in the world," the little man responded. "Pack up at once; wire to Gilbert; and start by the next train."

"I'm afraid I must," said Val, a little ruefully. "Hoskins! Find out the first train for Bristol."

"Yes, sir," said Hoskins, and departed.

"Have you made any arrangements to reduce your establishment while you sail round the world?" asked Reginald.

"Oh, no," said Strange. "The voyage round the world is not an enterprise to be undertaken without experience. We shall make preliminary voyages, and get gradually inured to the work."

"You can catch a train in an hour and a half from now," said Reginald. "Off you go; and we'll ride with you to the station; and then"—bowing solemnly to Gerard—"perhaps Mr. Lumby will do me the honor to come and lunch with me at home?"

"Very happy," said Gerard, rather clumsily. His heart began to beat with some irregularity, and he was conscious of a curious restraint.

Val, having made his moan about the breaking up of a pleasant lounge, and having enlarged on the disagreeableness of railway travel in the summer-time, went off to superintend his packing; and in due time the three started; Strange lolling in an open carriage, surrounded by sundry portmanteaus, and his companions riding on each side of him. Arrived at the station, the Spartan-minded mariner fortified himself for the journey, which was to last an hour and a half, by the purchase of all the daily and the comic

papers; and parted from his friends in a sudden burst of high spirits and alacrity.

Gerard and his new acquaintance rode away together leisurely. The young fellow was in a singular tumult, and had before this begun to suspect the truth concerning himself. Yet the truth, to a man so little sentimental, seemed absurd and laughable. To have seen a girl for a second or two, and to be thrown into a flutter by it for four-and-twenty-hours, and to find the rout of sense and senses growing completer even then, was an experience which would have seemed ridiculously improbable in any man's case to Gerard: and that it should happen to him, made him ashamed of himself. We can read with equanimity of the folly even of sages; but that we should ourselves be vulnerable, though we make no especial claim to wisdom, is startling to discover. This stalwart young Briton had indulged in no flirtations—had never played with the grand passion—had spoken despitefully of it—bragged a little in his secret heart that he was not a lady's man; and believed himself, when he thought about the matter at all, to be cut out for a comfortable bachelorhood.

Mr. Jolly's newly occupied residence lay, as the crow flies, not more than a mile and a half from Lumby Hall. From the roof of one house, the chimney-pots of the other could be descried; but the lower ridges of Daffin Head lay between them; and the Grange, like the Hall, looked southward, and was protected from northerly winds. Not half a mile from the gates of the smaller house, light craft could lie comfortably at anchor; but they were hidden from view by a little mound, and a feathery belt of firs, whose somber and unchanging green stood out against the pale blue of the hazy summer sky. Between this small anchorage and the front of Lumby Hall, rose the crags of Daffin Head round which many a white sail floated into sight in the summer weather, when the ranks of pleasure closed up alongside the ranks of trade. In days that came later, Valentine Strange took harbor within the shadow of those dusky pines, bearing within himself a deeper shadow than they could throw, a shadow which widened from himself, as such things will, and cast its gloom on many. Now, beyond the shadow of the gloomy pines, the sea murmured in the sunshine and the sea-mew called, and the white sails glittered, and the distant haze trembled in the

heat, and there was no sense of anything but rest and peace above this quiet haven.

But rest and peace are for the restful and peaceful, and the most exquisite of Nature's moods is caviare to the unquiet mind. Poor Gerard's heart beat dolefully as he rode by his companion's side to meet the goddess who was henceforth for so long to rule over him. Yet shall not the reader, if I can help it, picture to himself a mien disturbed, a countenance unsteady. The tremors Gerard felt were inward and hidden; and the little man riding with him could not have guessed, keen as he was, that Gerard had a tremor to hide.

It is probable that a handsome man can not be seen to greater advantage than on horseback. Gerard had a noble figure and a well-set head—a trifle too haughty in its carriage, as I have written already—though the frank good-humor of his face had something of a denial for that haughty bearing. His face was plain; but if you will think of it, you may be surprised to discover how little that matters in your estimate of a man, so long as the expression is one of openness and sweet temper. A young lady looking idly through the open spaces of a Venetian blind thought well of the young man's presence as he swept up the avenue and alighted at the door. A young lady with wonderful violet eyes, a young lady of very lovely form and exquisite feature and color, and attired in a morning dress of pure white, with lace ruffles at the wrists and throat. Her brown hair rippled over her shapely head, and grew low upon her broad fair forehead, as in Mr. Powers's charming bust of Clytie. She stood a minute to look at the new arrival, and recognized him. Then she turned, and for half a minute surveyed herself in a mirror, and finding herself faultless at all points, glided to her own room to add a touch to perfection.

When she descended and met Gerard in the cool dimness of the morning-room, and the bald-headed man said, "My sister Constance," the thing seemed ludicrous. Constance, muslin and laces and all, looked as though she might have risen, like Aphrodite, from the white sea-foam, a creature of inspiration, and not of vulgar birth. No such fancies were likely to cluster around her brother, who was decidedly unromantic in aspect.

"You have ridden from the Manor House at Brierham?"

she said. "Then I am sure you must be hungry. Shall I order luncheon?"

Now, as a conversational effort, there was nothing especially remarkable in this utterance; but I doubt greatly whether Gerard had, up to that time, ever listened to human speech which so pleased him. It was spoken with a smile which was delicious to look at. The clear silver voice came through such smiling gates of pearl and coral, such exquisite white teeth, such beautiful lips, that nothing it could say could be commonplace.

> He that loves a rosy cheek,
> Or a coral lip admires,
> Or from star-like eyes doth seek
> Fuel to maintain his fires,
> As old Time makes these decay,
> So his love shall waste away.

Is that so? Always? Perhaps it depends on the nature of the lover, with whom, in some rare and happy instances, age can not wither, nor custom stale the beauties that won his heart in youthful days. Beauty is a good gift, and I will not decry it. With a heart already prepared to yield, as Gerard's was, such rare and supreme charms as those he saw before him were sure of victory. He drank in Constance's words, and unconsciously stored them in his memory; so that years later he recalled the little commonplaces, the nothings of politeness and good-breeding spoken on that happy morning. His eyes were hungry for her face when he forced them to look away lest his gaze should embarrass her. He was too agitated to be happy, yet he thought himself so. Love's first draught is sweet enough; it is only in the after-taste that we taste its bitterness.

"The hour approaches Tam maun ride." It comes, that inexorable time, when we must go back to harness from the pleasant reaches of the river and idle summer days; or to our own lonely rooms, after the society of our own best intimates; or into the wild inane, which dwells everywhere save where our love may be.

"We shall see you often, I trust, Mr. Lumby." Thus the elder Jolly, a brown and withered man of five-and-fifty, with a dreary bent toward table oratory. Gerald would fain have said something, though no more than a word, to tell Constance how heavily time bade fair to drag with him

until he should meet her again; but he restrained himself, and said good-day politely, and no more. So, he loved and rode away. The inland-reaching meadows, the yellow sands that ran up from the sea to meet their sparser grasses, the familiar headlands, and the bay—how dreary they all looked to the new lover's eyes! There was an altogether novel restlessness upon him, and the fiery Rupert felt it, and fretted beneath it.

"Do you want to gallop?" said Gerard. "Gallop, then!" He laid the reins loose, and the horse shot across the turf with an exultant bound, and his master encouraged him with voice and hand. But not Rupert's noblest pace could carry Gerard away from himself. Says the quaint old songster:

> I attempt from Love's sickness to fly, but in vain,
> For I am myself my own fever and pain.

And Gerard was as near himself as ever when he checked Rupert at the foot of the hill which led homeward.

"Father," said the love-tormented youth, an hour later, "I think I shall run up to town to-morrow. There's nothing doing down here just now. Strange has gone away yachting, and I'm a trifle dull."

"Very well, my lad," said Mr. Lumby. It was his almost invariable answer to any expression of Gerard's will; and indeed, the father's continual indulgence might have done much damage to a mental constitution less firmly knit than Gerard's.

"I meant to go next week," said Gerard, "and I may as well run at once. The close of the season is coming; and I shall miss everybody if I delay much longer."

"Very well, my lad," said Lumby senior once more. "Shall you want any money?"

"No," said Gerard; "I think not. If I should, I'll call on Garling."

"Very well, my lad," assented the father once again. Garling was Mr. Lumby's right-hand man, the captain of his host. Mr. Lumby's father had bred Garling to business, and he had grown up into control side by side with the present head of the firm. He rather looked down on the younger partners; but since they looked up to him, and had been trained to business under him, things went more

smoothly than they commonly do when subordinate officers take the upper hand.

In the evening, after dinner, Gerard strolled from the house, and almost unconsciously walked toward Daffin Head, and sitting down within sight of the Grange, gave himself up to his own thoughts. Two days before, he had felt no especial interest in that eligible and desirable country residence. He had been familiar with it from childhood, and had known the people who had lived in it, a rather low and horsy set, who had come to grief upon the turf a year ago, and had disappeared, unregretted, from the county horizon. He had shunned the place all his life, except for the interchange of mere formal civility; and now it had suddenly become the very heart of this world, and began to draw him to itself, as though it were the seat of the center of gravitation. He sat and looked at it as the shadows gathered, and in a little while light began to twinkle in its windows. Through the dusk he strolled on again nearer and nearer by devious ways, until he passed the lodge gates. There was a possibility that young Jolly might be straying thereabouts, and might meet him and ask him in. At that fancy he turned unaccountably shy, and began to dread a chance encounter. Then meeting nobody, he felt disappointed that his dread had not been realized; and in that mood, with a vague hungry feeling superadded, he walked home again.

His youth and health and the open-air life he led were euough to stave off for the present that attendant upon first love, by doctors called insomnia. He slept soundly till the morning grew gray; and then he began to dream again of the violet eyes, and awoke restless and disquieted. I think that a manly youngster is always pretty certain to show fight in a matter of this kind, and not to yield himself tamely and without a struggle. It was at this time that Gerard, making brief preparations for his visit to town, resolved against the tenant of his heart, and turned rebel against Love. But the fight was unequal, and he was driven from the field of defiance with all his forces routed. He bought the promised presents for Milly; and surveying the treasures of the jeweler's trays, wished that he had the right to buy up the stock for Constance and lay its riches at her feet. He made calls, and received cards for the last receptions of the dying season, and was dull at all of them.

He went to the Opera, and Patti's liquid notes flowed unheard about his ears. He went to see Toole, and yawned dismally through a three-act farce, called a comedy, at which everybody in the house save himself shouted with laughter. Then at the end of a week, he went home again, and made Milly happy by his presents, and happier still by the promised waltzing lessons.

We become so soon habituated and inured to any new method of feeling or thinking, that in a day or two the new way seems as familiar as the old. Gerard might have been in love for a year by the time the Jollys gave their housewarming dinner, such a part of his life had love become. He dressed for that event with extraordinary care, and began to think slightingly of his own personal appearance. Until then, barring that general satisfaction with himself which is common to youth, he had not thought about it at all, and his new opinions abased him. Constance did the honors of the house like a queen, he thought; and indeed she was the object of much encomium. Such beauty could scarcely go unapproved; and it was the general opinion that Miss Jolly was a very charming addition to the county society. Perhaps it was only natural that the ladies should express less enthusiasm than the men; but *they* were reserved in their judgments, and refrained from encomiastic flights in which members of the more impressionable sex indulged.

Dinner over, Gerard maneuvered to be near Constance, and found himself assisted by Milly. There was nothing easier or less embarrassing in the world than to talk to Milly; and that young lady, having none of the shyness which Gerard felt for Constance, led the way to where she stood, taking the irresolute lover with her. It was as if a mastiff should have taken shelter behind a pigeon, this big, tanned Gerard wavering deviously toward his love under cover of the dainty Milly. Constance, once reached, was gracious enough. There was no chance for a confidential talk, for she played hostess, and was busy with her father's guests. Yet may the historic Muse record their converse, if but as a guide to future lovers, as chance conversations are set forth in foreign phrase-books for the help of tourists.

GERARD. Very warm, is it not, Miss Jolly?

CONSTANCE. Very warm, indeed. My dear Mrs. Weatherley, how do you do?"

[Mrs. Weatherley, after sundry commonplaces, retires.

GERARD. You were not in town at the end of the season?

CONSTANCE. No.

GERARD. Everything was very dull. Dullest time I can remember. I was longing to be back in the country all the time.

CONSTANCE. Were you, indeed?

GERARD (beholding an opportunity for saying something brilliantly complimentary, but not quite knowing what to say, or how to say it). Yes.

CONSTANCE. My dear Miss Pennfeather, I have so been wishing to see you.

[Gush. Miss Pennfeather retires.

GERARD. I hope you'll excuse me, Miss Jolly, but you must really allow me to congratulate you upon the decorations. I'm rather a judge of that sort of thing, and they're really charming.

CONSTANCE. I am *so* glad you like them.

MILLY. Aunty is beckoning me with her fan. Will you give me your arm?

[Gerard bows to his idol, and retires.

CONSTANCE. My dear Agnes, I am charmed to see you. How do you do, Mr. Dolby?

[The strains of music overpower all voices.

Gerard piloted Milly across the room, and surrendered her to the care of his mother, and then retired to a doorway, against which he lounged, looking on the glittering scene with no lightness of heart. He reviewed the conversation above recorded, and wrote himself down an ass for his share in it. How different he was from Constance! How far removed from her—how much beneath her! The unprejudiced observer fails to see the truth of all this. Miss Jolly was very beautiful, but she was not a Minerva for wisdom. There was nothing in her converse to dazzle us who are not in love with her. Yet let no youth or maiden smile superior over Gerard's raptures and his self-disdain. You, who laugh, have yet to go through your experiences. We, who are middle-aged, have had *our* day, and we remember, not without unavailing longing for the past.

CHAPTER IV.

HIRAM "LOOKS AROUND FOR SOMETHING TO GET A LIVIN' AT."

THE Black Horse at Brierham was not a luxurious hostel, but it satisfied Hiram Search. It was an easy matter to satisfy him just then, and even the Black Horse was more attractive to a weary man than the open fields. Hiram was hungry as well as tired; and the unpretending inn had bread-and-cheese and cider, all home-made and wholesome. The landlord, discerning Hiram's foreign extraction by his tongue, pressed him to eat. "I shall charge 'ee vorpence whatever 'ee gets outside on," said the landlord; "zo eed better take thy vill." He was not a man to go back from this hospitable invitation; but Hiram accepted it in such good faith, that the watching landlord grew skeptical of profit on his custom. "You be main hungry, aperiently, mate," said the landlord. Hiram was too busy to waste breath in answer. He raised his sharp eyes to the landlord's face and nodded, and then went on with a relishing sip at the cider. The host watched him with more philosophy than might have been expected of him, until at last, with a sigh of pure contentment, Hiram pushed away the brown home-made loaf and the white crumbling cheese, and doubling up the huge clasp-knife, returned it to his pocket. After solemnly enjoying a pipe, he paid his bill and went to bed, in a small room with a sloping roof. Small as the room was, there were two beds in it, and on one of them lay a hulking fellow in heavy highlows and a patched suit of cords. A resting-place of any sort was too precious to be quarreled with; and Hiram, having partly undressed, made sure of the safety of his money, and lay down. He was asleep in twenty seconds, and never moved until the rays of the morning sun struck through the uncurtained window and awoke him. He turned over to avoid the glare, and became conscious of his patched and hobnailed companion, who was snoring terrifically. Hiram took up one of his own boots and dropped it noisily upon the floor. The man ceased to snore, and by and by

sat up, yawning and rubbing his eyes, and grumbling in a sleepy undertone.

"Nice mornin', ain't it?" said Hiram.

The hobnailed man looked surlily round, and anathematized the nice morning; then arising, he shook himself, rumpled his coarse red hair with his freckled hands, reached out for a rabbit-skin cap, and, in completion of his simple toilet, put it on, and began to smoke. Hiram gathered his few belongings, and went down-stairs to the inn-yard, where he refreshed himself at the pump. The people of the house were astir already, and one or two heavy fellows who looked like quarrymen, were taking a morning drink at the bar. The entrance of a policeman created some sensation and the quarrymen moved uneasily, as in the presence of a native enemy. The official with loud dignity demanded the landlord, who appeared before him smiling in a propitiatory manner and proffering drink.

"I've got information as Corduroy Jim is here," said the policeman loudly.

Hiram, polishing himself on a jack-towel in the yard, heard this statement, and wondered casually whether Corduroy Jim was the man who had shared his room last night. He looked up to the window, and saw the red-headed man busy at the fastening.

"No affair o' mine," said Hiram, and entered still towelling himself.

"So a be, Mister Blunt," said the landlord.

"Well, I want him," returned the officer, all importance.

"What have he been a-doin of?" inquired the host.

"Old game," returned the officer—"poachin'. Where is he? Let's have a look at him." The policeman said this with a waggish air, as though there were somehow a joke in it; and the quarrymen gave him the laugh which his glance demanded.

"He be upstair," said the landlord. "He slep' here last night along o' that young man."

The official regarded "that young man" thus indicated, and bent upon him a brow of stern severity, as though the circumstance had clothed him with suspicion; but Hiram encountering his gaze with a wink and a friendly nod, the glance of authority dwindled and faded; and the police-

man, who was a little young at his business, looked sheepish.

"Show the way," he said, recovering a sense of his importance; and he and the landlord marched heavily upstairs. Hiram pricked up his ears and listened. There was heard a certain clatter of hobnailed boots in the paved yard, and the owner of the rabbit-skin cap and the corduroys was seen in the act of climbing a low wall. Down came the landlord and the policeman roaring "Stop him!" Nobody seemed to feel a call in that direction, and the officer went in pursuit alone.

"Drabbit un!" said the landlord. "He haven't paid for his bed. He must ha' dropped out o' winder."

Away went the corduroys, and away, a hundred yards behind, went the representative of law. Law came up hand over hand, and then, his breath failing suddenly, stood disconsolate, and watched the hobnails glinting away into the distance. Thus foiled, the officer had no mind to return to the "Black Horse," but took his melancholy way across the meadows to report his failure. The excitement of the chase having subsided, it came out that the landlord had a double grievance. The illegal sportsman had not only left his bill unpaid, but he had left a contract unfulfilled. The landlord had engaged him to mend half a dozen chairs, and the mending process had gone no further than the cutting away of the old canes.

"An' now," murmured the landlord, "*I* ain't got ne'er a cheer for nobody to set on in *my* house. An' as like as naht, it ull be a twel'month avore a cheer-mender puts his foot inside the county."

"What's your pay for the job?" inquired Hiram.

The landlord named his price; and after a little chaffering, Hiram undertook the work; and being provided with the slips of split cane and the simple tools left behind by the illegal sportsman, he sat down in the shade, lit a pipe, and surveyed his task with the eye of a master of the chair-mending craft. It may be worth while to say that the work was utterly new to him.

"Naow," said the wily Hiram, with an unseated chair in one hand and a bundle of canes in the other, "what's your notion? Is theer any partic'lar style you fancy?"

The landlord didn't know as how there was.

"Ain't you got another cane-seated cheer in the house?

Very well, then. You'd like 'em to match, I reckon. Bring the cane-seated arm-chair out, an' let me have a look at it. That's right. The arm-cheer's like the father o' the fam'ly, an' you can't help wantin' the children to feature him a little."

Hiram, having procured the desired model, examined it closely, and fell into the work with marvelous quickness. Before he had been at it an hour he was caning away with the greatest dexterity, and whistling at his labor as cheerful as the throstle.

"Wherever one man slips out," said Hiram to himself in the pauses of his music, "there's room for another to slip in. We air so tight wedged in this effete old planet that if a man once gets outside the crowd, he finds it hard to shoulder in again. But if a feller keeps his eyes peeled, somebody's pe-rennially fallin' over the edge into general space, an' then there's room for another pair o' feet to stand in. Young man in the skin-cap ain't likely to assoom this route again for some while. I'll conduct his business for him."

The first chair being completed, he surveyed the work of his hands with smiling admiration; and having sat upon it to test its firmness, he admired it anew.

"It is sing'lar," meditated Hiram, "how pretty a thing looks when a man's done it himself. A cheer-bottom is not an artistic object, regarded in the abstract; but this yer arrangement looks real nice, I dew declare. Whatever a man does, he puts a bit of himself into it, an' then he thinks it's handsome. Human natur'," pursued the philosopher beginning on another chair, "would prob'ly work very rusty if it wa'n't greased with a little self-appreciation. That is so. Now, only this mornin' to see that gell in the house here smilling at herself in a scrap o' lookin'-glass; an' yet if she was to see that head of hers on top of any other gell's figger, she'd laff at it. An' then to see me lookin' at a cheer-bottom as if I loved it—smirkin' at it, like a candidate at a voter—just because I've put it together. We air curious critters, sir; an' no man is free from human frailty."

His thin clever fingers made no stay whilst he thus communed with himself, talking in a low continuous nasal hum, with only one word audible here and there. He seemed by this time as well accustomed to the work as if it had

been his daily occupation; and when the landlord came out to look at him, no suspicion that Hiram was an amateur chair-mender crossed his mind. Hiram finished his work, and the landlord paid the stipulated price.

"If you happen to have the half-sovereign I changed last night," said Hiram, "I should like to have it back again.

The landlord had that one half-sovereign and no other; and Hiram gave silver in exchange for it.

Some of the canes remaining over, and the landlord claiming them, Hiram chaffered for them; and went his way with a few loose sixpences to keep the half-sovereign company, and a new trade in his fingers. He approached London by a devious route, going out of his way to any little town where the new trade seemed likely to thrive. Living sparely, and working wherever he found a chance, he thrived so well that he reached the great city with a total stock of fifty shillings, prepared to begin the world anew. At first sight, London struck him as being more than a trifle dingy and oppressive, and he was tired with a long day's tramp. But having secured a cheap lodging and refreshed himself by an hour's rest, he strolled out again on a journey of observation.

"Twopence all the way," yelled an omnibus conductor, hanging on by his strap at a remarkable angle and gesticulating wildly.

"Be at rest, young man," said Hiram serenely; "I will travel all the way." He tendered twopence.

"Pay when you get down," said the conductor. "Here's a land for trust an' confidence," said Hiram to himself. "How does he know when a man has twopence?" He sat on the knifeboard and smoked, surveying London.

"I've read somewhere," he mused, "that in this triflin' village a man dies every five minutes. That's a chance each five minutes to them that's left. Now, I've been here three hours, an' if my statistics air correct, I've missed six-and-thirty chances already. It's real ghastly to think of, if it's true, an' I suppose it is. Twelve tragedies an hour. Twelve sufferin' souls relieved from twelve sufferin' bodies every hour in this amazin' congregation." Hiram's thoughts were growing grave, and London was beginning to lay hold of him as it does with all men who can think and feel. Out of the loud noise and hurrying crowds of

Whitechapel, the omnibus rolled on to the solemn quiet which lies when the business of the day is done about the Exchange and the Bank and deserted Cheapside. "Looks as if there'd been a plague here," thought the stranger. The streets were as sparsely peopled as those of his native village.

As the omnibus traveled to what seemed a new city, all glare and gloom, the conductor came to the roof to collect his fares. He was a red-faced young man, with signs of drink upon him—blotched, blear-eyed, and puffy. His hot breath struck a blast of gin full in the traveler's face, and Hiram turned his head away disgusted. At that second the vehicle lurched slightly; there was a cry from one of the passengers; and Hiram, looking round, missed the figure of the conductor. The man had fallen backward from the roof, and lay upon the stony pavement with his limbs abroad, and his blotched face uppermost. The driver arrested his horses; the passengers descended, and ran to the prostrate figure; people from the pavements and the shops made a crowd about it.

"Stand clear!" cried Hiram. "Give the man a breath of air." He raised the helpless head and shoulders; and those in the inner circle pressed back and forced a little space. "Get a glass of water, somebody," said Hiram, passing a firm but gentle hand over the man's limbs. "Right arm's broke," he said, after this brief examination. A glass of water was handed over the heads of the crowd, and reached him half empty. In the conductor's fall, a handful of copper and silver money had been thrown from the leathern pouch he carried, and one or two men busied themselves picking up the scattered coins. One scarecrow, who had picked up half-a-crown, was making off with it, when Hiram's long arm and lean fingers shot out after him and seized him. "Hand over!" said Hiram; and the quaking wretch surrendered his booty, and slipped into the crowd, glad to hide himself. The others, with that mechanical surrender to any seeming of authority which is the most noticeable characteristic of men in crowds, followed suit and laid their findings in Hiram's outstretched palm. By this time the driver had cumbrously released himself from the straps and wrappages, and had made his way to his injured colleague's side, followed by a policeman. A cab was called, and the man was driven to a hospital. The

people dispersed. Some of the passengers, who were scrupulous, paid their fare to the driver. Others, who were not, availed themselves of the accident, and economized. Hiram resumed his seat upon the omnibus.

"I can't take no passengers without a conductor," said the driver. "It's agen the law. I'm a-goin' to drive 'ome now."

"I've got some money belongin' to that poor feller," said Hiram, "an' I'll give it in at the proper quarter."

"All right," responded the driver. The 'bus rolled on again, this time to the Company's offices, where the driver told his tale, and Hiram surrendered the money.

"Much obliged to you, I'm sure," said the official in charge; "but you needn't have taken the trouble. You might have given it to the driver."

"Well," said Hiram, "I didn't want to lose a chance. I only reached London to-night, an' I'm looking around for somethin' to get a livin' at. Wherever one man gets broke, 'pears to me another's wanted to take his place; an' till your man's mended, I'm game to take hisn."

"We *are* rather short of hands just now," said the official in charge.

"Mind, mister," pursued Hiram, "I don't want to take no man's cheese from between his teeth; but I'm game to hold that man's place an' keep it warm till you've got him mended."

The official smiled, and asked: "Can you get anybody to give you a character, or be surety for you?"

"I don't know a creetur in the city," said Hiram; "but mebbe that'll do for surety." He laid two pounds upon the desk. "The job ain't the sort that takes seven years' apprenticeship to learn, is it?"

"Why, no," said the other, smiling again. "Come here in the morning at half past seven o'clock, and they'll give you an answer at once." Hiram took up his money and retired, having made a note of the address. Pausing now and then to ask his way, he walked back to his lodgings.

Behold Hiram, two days later, after an interview favorably conducted, and after all due formalities achieved, invested with badge and satchel, and in fullness of time assuming his place as conductor. On his first journey, he was content to repeat the hoarse cries of the driver. On the

second journey, he was familiar with his duties. Before the day was done, he had merged his own notions of the English language in the waters of oblivion, and cried, "Benk! Benk! Benk!" or "Whitecheppel!" like an omnibus conductor to the manner born. He appeared by and by in a tall white hat and a scarf of vivid blue and scarlet, and became a man of mark. The regular travelers upon his route began to know him, and he throve and grew immensely popular. It was noticed at the office at which he paid in his money that the receipts of the vehicle he superintended had amazingly increased, and the authorities put their own construction upon that fact. Mr. Search was incorruptibly honest and scrupulously careful. Mr. Search was neat and smart in personal appearance, and had indeed become something of a dandy. Mr. Search shunned the intoxicating cup, was always up to his work, always good-humored, yet never without his quaint repartee when needed—could indeed sting upon occasion—in short, he became a most respected member of a not too-respected or respectable body. That eminent patter vocalist, The Great Blower, advertised as the author, composer, and only singer of "The Leary Cove," heard of Hiram, traveled many stages by omnibus in order to study him, and appeared at the Megatherium Concert Hall as the author, composer, and only singer of "The Yankee Toff," with an imitation of Hiram, which raised him to a very pinnacle of fame amongst the conductors of his day. The ditty of the Great Blower became popular, and Hiram heard it from many barrel-organs. Street youths whistled it and shouted it; nightly choruses with applausive accompaniment of hand and foot, were sung to it at the Megatherium Concert Hall, and Hiram became a celebrity.

"I reckon," Hiram would say to himself, in contemplation of this and other matters, as he swung on his strap behind the omnibus, "that you British people air *the* feather-headedest on the face o' the globe. It don't take much to set you goin'—that's a fact. An' yet, you're that o-pinionated about the national solidity o' character, you make me laff. You air allays flyin' off the handle about things that a civilized infant wouldn't cry or smile at, and then you say, 'We air a solid people—we air John Bull—we air—in all our doin's. If ever I fall real low in life, I'll take to lecturin', an' tell you what I think about you."

The incense of Fame had no effect upon Hiram, and in the course of a few weeks the "star comique" of the Megatherium had found a new theme, and the raucous ditty of "The Yankee Toff" was forgotten. The conductor's only grievance was that the post he held gave so little time for the pursuit of inquiry into wider and shorter avenues to fortune. His duties began at eight in the morning, and continued until half-past eleven at night. Holidays were few and far between; and Hiram was gradually growing readier and more ready to emancipate himself, when an event happened which influenced his whole career—an event the like of which has influenced more careers than any mathematician now alive would care to count. All sorts of assaults of Fate had Hiram submitted to, and he was beginning to think himself invulnerable, when this stroke came upon him, and he succumbed almost without an effort to avert it, or to recover from it.

Hiram, it must be said, had rather a gallant and insinuating way with the ladies. His manner toward the fair sex was marked by a polish and a finish to which few gentlemen of his profession have aspired. Did Hiram behold a lady on the curb, the imperious cry of "Benk! Benk! Benk!" which bade the traveling world be seated and no longer keep him waiting, was instantly modulated to a tone of gentleness, almost of confidence, "Benk, ma'am!" The tone had even a touch of slyness in it, as though it were a secret that the lady chose to go that way, and only she and Hiram knew it. There was something in the manner of his opening the omnibus door to a lady—a *je ne sais quoi*—an artistic tone of mind was somehow impressed upon the action. It soothed old women—it flattered plain women—young and pretty women were not unimpressed by it.

It was his particular hobby to keep time like a ship's chronometer, and to arrive at every pausing-place and to leave it to the nearest possible fraction of a minute. This business-like peculiarity being noticed by people who had regular appointments at settled hours, he secured a constant *clientèle* for both journeys, and, amongst other passengers, he every day took up a young girl within a hundred yards of his own lodgings, and sat her down at a certain corner in Cheapside, reversing the process in the evening. She was pale and thin; but had that delicate and fragile

prettiness which is noticeable in many girls of city breeding. She was scrupulously neat; but her garments indicated no great prosperity. Her mantle was threadbare, her gloves were mended; there was a look of waiting in the pale and patient face. Hiram regarding these things, felt almost a pang of pity when the morning or evening twopence dropped from the gloved thumb and finger into his own palm. It was hard to take it; and if the vehicle had not been an omnibus, but a carriage, and Hiram's own, he would have set it at her service. The keen winds of autumn mornings were blowing clouds of dust about the streets, and she came no better clad. The threadbare mantle was more threadbare; the neat little linen collar and the neat white cuffs showed woful signs of wear; when closely looked at, the gentle face grew paler and more sad. One morning Hiram missed the figure at the accustomed corner, and was amazed to find how much he missed it. Without a signal from him, the driver stopped at the corner at which the little milliner or shop-girl was accustomed to alight, and Hiram, in the act of ringing the 'bus-bell to set him going again, saw her walking down the by-street, and knew that the morning twopence had grown too precious to be missed.

"Poor pretty creetur," said the gentle-hearted Hiram. "The ile's dried up, an' the barrel o' meal's pretty clean scraped, I reckon. Wonder now, if I could get her to drive gratis. Most likely she'd feel insulted if I asked her." Hiram, watching for the little figure at morning and evening in the dusty streets, saw it sometimes beneath a shabby umbrella, and sometimes so fluttered by the wind that it almost seemed she might be blown away bodily like a leaf.

It so befell that Hiram on one of his rare holidays found himself sauntering down Cheapside at the hour at which the little girl began her journey home. There was the fragile figure with its hurried yet graceful step, before him. Hiram's long legs kept him within easy distance, though he seemed to do no more than lounge. She went on, looking neither to right nor left; and Hiram followed. He had ample time to study the thin garb, the worn shoes, unfit for the greasy pavement over which the little feet tripped so quickly; and his sharp eyes took note of every sign of poverty, and every struggle to be neat and to hide poverty away. She turned at the accustomed corner, and Hiram, with a shame-faced reluctance to play the spy upon her,

could not refrain from following. Right and left, and right and left again. Then she paused before a dingy door in a street of excessive shabbiness, and admitted herself with a latch-key. Hiram sauntered past the house, and saw a card above the door inscribed, "A Furnished Room for a Single Gentleman."

"That's near enough," said Hiram. "I do not lay out to be a gentleman; but I'll bet I'm single; an' mebbe I'm as near the gentlemanly mark as they are to be found in this locality." He sauntered past the house again. "Why not?" he asked himself. "It's near my starting-point, I'll have a look at it any way." He advanced to the door and knocked. The girl herself appeared, and looked at him with a glance of no recognition. "You have lodgings for a single man to let?" he said.

"Yes," she responded. "Do you wish to see them?" Her voice was gentle like her face, and had a tired tone in it, as the face had a tired look.

Hiram answered "Yes." It was dusk within the house; and she left him for a moment and returned with a candle. Going toward him with the light upon her face, she looked more worn and fragile than before. She led the way up-stairs into a small room, neat and clean, but sparely furnished.

"What's the rent?" asked Hiram.

"Four shillings a week," the girl answered. Her glance said so plainly: "Take it; oh, pray, do take it!" that Hiram's voice was quite husky when he answered:

"That's a very small rent for such a nice little room. When could I come in?"

"Oh," she said, "at any time."

"To-night?" suggested Hiram.

"Yes," she answered; and Hiram, producing a purse which was by this time fairly stocked, paid a week's rent in advance. The girl's face brightened at the sight of the money as no face so young and tender ought to have brightened at so trivial a windfall, Hiram thought. "Poor," he said inwardly: "Deadly poor!" There seemed nothing more to linger for. She held the candle aloft, to show him the way down-stairs; and when he looked at her a sort of halo rested on her hair. The weary expression of her face had changed to one that had a gleam of hope in it. "Poor," said Hiram, inwardly again—"deadly poor!"

"Are you the landlady?" he asked, turning at the first step.

"My mother rents the house," she answered. "She is not very well. But you can see her, if you think it necessary."

"Not at all," he said, and descended, but turned again in the hall. "I forgot to ask the name and address," he explained.

She set down the candle, and entered a room, the door of which opened on the hall, returning in a moment with an addressed envelope.

"Martial is the name?" said Hiram, looking at it. "Air you Miss Martial?" She inclined her head gravely. "Good-night, miss," said Hiram; "though I shall be here in an hour." She inclined her head again, and the door closed behind him. The lodgings he had hitherto used were not more than a quarter of a mile away, and Hiram's whole belongings were easily packed in a second-hand carpet-bag and a second-hand hat-box. The landlady claimed a week's rent in lieu of a week's notice; and he paid it and emerged upon the street.

"You will not die a millionaire, young man," he said admonishing himself. "You are not so encumbered with the pieces that you can afford to chuck 'em blindfold. But, Hiram, do you know what that little creetur's face said when you counted them four shillin's down? 'Here,' it said as plain as a book—'here is an onexpected—meal'" He paused before the last word, and breathed it half aloud. "Hiram," he went on, "how many ordinary-lookin' females have you drove since you adopted the pro-fesh you live by? How many of 'em's been that poor it's a pity to look at 'em? An' how many of 'em have *you* yearned over, Hiram? Come now, how many? Don't you be ridicalous. It's no kind-heartedness in you. It's a pretty face and a nice manner that's fetched you so, sir. Have the murder out, Hiram, have it out! You've fell in love, you have, an' you don't know no more about the young woman you've fell in love with than a yeller dog in Constantinople knows about 'Pilgrim's Progress.'"

CHAPTER V.

"YOU WERE TIRED OF ME, AND WISHED ME DEAD."

It was a settled creed with the employés of the firm that the house of Lumby and Lumby was to go on forever. The younger hands and heads whose owners discharged subordinate duties, figured and thought in lines of routine so fixed and settled—in office hours—by the inexorable Garling, that all chances of mutation seemed far away. And Mr. Garling himself had so long been a part of the house that to him the house might well seem fixed and solid as the hills. Mr. Garling, though under fifty, was an old-world man to look at. He wore high collars of the fashion of a score of years ago, and a black satin stock of equal date; and he carried his watch in a fob with a bunch of seals dangling from it, as gentlemen in the City had done in his boyhood, if ever Garling had been a boy—which seemed doubtful. For thirty years and more, his respectable, square-toed boots had worn the stones between his rooms in Fleet Street and the Gresham Street threshold of the house of Lumby and Lumby.

Mr. Garling's father had practiced the hair-dresser's art in Fleet Street. There was still a hair-dresser in the old house, and Garling went on living there. For thirty years he had been a familiar figure at Lumby and Lumby's, and yet a figure with whose inner personality no man had ever been familiar. We all go shrouded more or less, and nobody knows much about the most communicative of us. But Garling had been self-contained in his school-days; and in manhood his self-containment grew to look like secrecy; and with approaching age his secrecy grew more profound. He never spoke to anybody when he could help it; and, when compelled to speak, he said as little as possible. No one ever fancied that Garling had more than other people to conceal. "It was Garling's way" to be close; it was Garling's way to take snuff secretly, as though he hoped to find in it some ground for an indictment against his tobacconist; it was his way to hang above his ledger secretly, as though it contained mysteries; it was his way to secrete himself within himself as he walked the very streets, as

though he were a suspicious circumstance, and his being there a thing unauthorized: it was his way to dine in a secret corner in a secret chop-house in a secret court, as though his meals were conspiracies in imminent danger of detection. All these were Garling's ways, and were openly canvassed and laughed at as eccentric—in Garling's absence—by the most junior of the junior clerks.

If Garling had relatives, he kept them secret, like himself. There was a general impression that he was rich; and that indeed seemed like enough, he earned so much and spent so little. The house was wealthy, and disposed to be generous where it trusted; and it had trusted Garling now for nearly twenty years implicitly, and had had its trust rewarded. How many nights had he sat at his desk poring above vast ledgers when the offices were silent? How many hours of voluntary time had he thrown into Time's gulf at home in his own rooms, sitting immersed in figures, with shaggy black brows drawn downward, making secrets of his eyes, as great schemes for the benefit of the house simmered behind his bulbous, wrinkled forehead? No man could tell, and Garling never told. He was the very jewel of a servant. Under his fostering care, the great house grew greater, and its solid foundations stretched out further and further, and its wide arms, like those of Briareus, reached forth a hundred ways at once, and drew in money. People, who were unfitted to understand Garling's character, set it down as a thing not to be doubted that he himself profited directly by the extension of the firm's business—that he had a fixed share in the profits, or a commission on the increase of sound business done: and these commonplace men pooh-poohed the idea of such engrossing and unselfish enthusiasm as other men believed in. But Mr. Lumby himself was wont to say that Garling's financial genius was wasted on the petty concerns of a mere business firm, and that he ought to have been perpetual Chancellor of the Imperial Exchequer. He said often that Garling's genius for figures was just as lofty as Mozart's genius for music, or Shakespeare's for play-writing, and that it *would* be satisfied, even if he took to logarithms for pastime.

And so under Garling's management the house of Lumby and Lumby solidly thrived and grew, and Garling kept himself a secret.

Living as he did at a total outlay of not more than two

hundred pounds per annum, it was not a thing to be surprised at that Garling had a solid balance at his bankers'. Nor was it in the least a thing to wonder at that he should invest his money on his own account, or that when he had drawn a large check, he should invariably pay in a larger a short time afterward. The balance in this way grew more than respectable, and Garling bought shares and sold, and always profited. His bankers had a high respect for him. Everybody respected him. A man who does his duty in a fashion so exemplary, and who makes money also on his own account, is bound to be respected.

On a certain evening in late summer, Mr. Garling sat at his own office-room with a ponderous tome before him containing many columns of straight-ruled figures. The house was quiet, the street was quiet, the gas made a little singing noise which in the stillness was clearly audible. There was yet a tranquil light outside, but the chief cashier's office was always dull, and he burned gas there nearly all day long. Everybody else had gone home an hour ago, save the night-watchman, who slept on the premises, and he had but newly arrived. In a distant part of London, a lanky, dusty, way-worn figure was at that moment walking from street to street on the lookout for lodgings. The lanky figure was on its way to take part in that little story to which the cashier belonged; but neither Mr. Garling nor Hiram Search was likely to guess as much. Can *you*, reader, guess who is coming to you out of to-morrow—out of next year—out of any cranny in the vast gulf of Time and Circumstance, to blend a life with yours?

Hiram strolled on three miles away, and the cashier meditated. The bushy black brows, down-drawn and making secrets of his eyes, were for once unburdened with arithmetic. As he sat with arms folded, head bent, back bowed, and feet depending straight downward from his knees, he looked, taken in profile, like a human note of interrogation. Set after what secret question?

Coming slowly out of the maze of his own thoughts, he drew a letter from his pocket and read it through. It was addressed to "E. Martial, Esq.," under the care of that hair-dresser above whose shop Mr. Garling had residential chambers; and it was written in a woman's hand.

"I will not approach you," so the letter ran, "with any

attempt to remind you of the affection which you professed so many years ago. That I relied upon it, and that you played me false, is all I care for you to remember now. But I *will* have justice done to Mary. I have besought you long enough, and I do not wish to threaten even now. But I am not the less resolved, and what I can do for my daughter shall be done."

This letter bore no date or name of place, no preface of any sort, and had no signature; but Mr. Garling had no doubt about the writer or the place of her abode. He read the letter once or twice, frowning more and more heavily, and then having folded it and restored it to his pocket, he closed the ponderous tome before him, took down his hat from a peg above his head, turned out the gas, and left the room, locking the door behind him—all in a slow, deliberate, customary way. Lumby and Lumby's central offices were not without a suspicion of dry-rot in their musty atmosphere; but the cashier drew in the air in the corridor, as though it refreshed him after the close heat of his own room; and making his way with the sure step of custom down the dusky stairs, he nodded gravely, in answer to the watchman's parting salutation, and came upon the street. Quitting Gresham Street he reached Cheapside, turned his back upon St. Paul's, and walked toward the Exchange, and voicelessly hailing a passing omnibus, rode on to Whitechapel, and alighted at a street corner. He walked slowly down the by-street, and then turned right and left, and right and left again. He paused before a dingy door in a street of excessive shabbiness, and knocked. Looking upward through the dusk whilst he waited a response, he could just read the inscription on the card in the fanlight, "Furnished Room for a Single Gentleman." The door was opened by a girl with a face of fragile beauty. She was poorly but neatly dressed, and had a pretty figure, too slender and delicate for health. He stood so long regarding her in silence, that after asking his business and receiving no answer she shrunk back to close the door; but he raised a hand as if to forbid her and asked dryly: "Your mother is in?"

"Yes, sir," answered the girl,

"Show me to her," he said quietly, and entered.

"What name shall I say?" she asked timidly, as if afraid of him.

"Never mind the name," he responded. "Show me to her."

She stood irresolute; but he stepped beyond her and tapped with his knuckles at a door leading from the narrow hall, and a thin voice crying, "Come in," he entered. The girl followed him, and stood in the door-way. Seated in an arm-chair beyond the fire-place was a woman, whose likeness to the girl was so strong as to betray their relationship at once. The room was bare and shabby, and was littered with odds and ends of cloth. A pile of loose folds of cloth lay upon the central table, and a piece of cloth trailed from the woman's lap upon the hearth-rug. She had been busy sewing, and the needle was arrested at the thread's length, and stayed there when the cashier entered.

"You did not expect that I should be so punctual," he said. His voice was stiff and measured, and his manner cold.

"No," she answered him, speaking with evident effort.

He removed his hat and took a chair; and turning his face slowly toward the girl, he signed to her to leave the room. She obeyed with a look of some bewilderment. When she had gone, he drew the chair a little nearer to the empty fire-place, and throwing one leg over the other, sat in silence. The woman looked at him helplessly, as if expecting him to speak first; but he surveyed her quietly from beneath bent brows of habitual calculation, and said nothing. But for the wrinkles which many hours of business-plotting had left upon it, his face was almost expressionless, and he sat so still that he might have been a statue. The woman confronting him with uncertain glances, never long continued, still held the needle at the thread's length, and when her eyes had sought his half a dozen times, and each time had dropped again, the shadow of a smile flitted across his face and died away.

"You received my letter?" she said, at length, when the silence had grown unbearable. He nodded in quiet affirmation. "Why are you here?" she asked, after a long pause.

"To answer it," he returned.

She looked at him once again, and could read neither threat nor promise in his impassive face. "How?" she asked.

"In this way," responded the cashier, uncrossing his

legs and leaning forward. "By saying briefly and once for all that I will take my way, and that you may take yours, as you chose to take it long ago."

"As *I* chose to take it?" she asked, in a voice of amazement.

"By telling you once for all that I will listen to no entreaties; that I will not be moved by any threats; that I am neither to be cajoled nor shaken." He fell back into his chair, crossed his legs again, and regarded her fixedly once more. She made no answer; but sitting with her hands lying loosely in her lap, she looked the picture of helplessness and despair. After a long pause, he arose, took his hat, and made a movement to the door. With a suddenness that made him start backward, she swept across the room and stood before him.

"You shall not go!" she cried, wringing her hands, as though they wrestled with each other, and each had much ado to keep the other down. He looked at her darkly and coldly, and after that one backward movement, stood stock still, without a word. "I *will* have justice," she said wildly and rapidly. "You shall not leave your wife and child to starve and drudge year after year, whilst you heap up money for no reason." He kept his eyes upon her face, and made no answer. "Are you made of stone?" she cried. "How long have I suffered? How long am I to suffer? Are we to live here till we die?"

"Live where you please," he answered, and made a movement to the door; but she confronted him still.

"What wrong did I ever do you, that you treat me so?" she moaned.

"Still playing at innocence?" he sneered, dryly.

"Playing at innocence?" Something of his own look darkened her face. "I have never needed to play at innocence; but you have played at suspicion for your own wicked purposes. You were tired of me, and wished me dead."

"Devoutly," he interjected, with no touch of anger or of satire in his tone. There might have been a cruel humor in the word, but neither face nor voice bore sign of it.

"And so," she went on, "you pretended to suspect me, and forged a chain of lies about my steps, and hemmed me in, and bound me down with them."

"Why did you leave me?" he demanded, in the same dry tones.

"There is no one here, Edward," she answered, with a weary bitterness. "You can not justify yourself to yourself, or to me, and there is no listener here to play a part to."

"Why did you leave me?" he asked again, in tones a ghost might have used, they were so passionless beside her anger, her weariness, and her despair.

"You drove me from your house with threats."

"Of what? Of exposure, shall we say?" She moved her head from side to side in a very rage of helplessness. "You left me—under what circumstances you remember. I offered to support your child even then. I made you such provision as my means allowed." She did not know that his salary at that time had been eight hundred pounds a year; but she remembered that the allowance thus recalled to mind had been one of ten shillings a week. "Why did I withdraw that allowance?"

"Because," she cried, "you knew I had lived apart from you long enough to compromise myself if I should endeavor to make good a legal claim against you. Because you knew I loved my own fair fame too well to have it smeared by my husband's public perjuries. Because I was altogether helpless, and in your power."

"We have lived apart still longer now," he answered coldly. "I trust you love your fair fame as well as ever." The taunt so wrung her that she moaned aloud. "Are you less helpless now?" She made no reply, and he repeated his question: "Are you less helpless now?"

"I am as helpless," she responded then, weaving her thin fingers together and dragging them apart, "as any creature in the world."

"So I believe," he said—"so I believe." Saying this, he took snuff, turning a little apart from her in his secret way, but keeping his hard eyes upon her sideways. In spite of the customary mask of no expression which he had made it the business of his life to wear, there was a look of cruel triumph in his face as he regarded her. The business-like acquiescence of his tone so cut the woman to the quick that she cast her hands wildly upward, as if appealing to Heaven against him, and burst into a tempest of tears. "And so," he said, taking snuff again, "our interview closes as all our interviews used to close."

There is cement that is hardened by contact with water. Garling might have been made of it, so little effect had tears upon him. He brushed his hat upon his sleeve, and cast an uninterested look about the room. Then with a calm "Good-evening," he left the apartment, closing the door behind him, and having reached the street, walked back to the main road, hailed a passing omnibus, and sat secretly in one corner of it until within thirty yards of his own door, at which time a disaster, already recorded, befell the conductor. It has been mentioned that one or two of the passengers chose to profit by the opportunity thus afforded for the exercise of the virtue called economy. Garling was one of them. Twopence saved was twopence gained, to Garling. He saw the injured man driven away—for, secret as he was, he felt an interest in the events of the day, like other people—and then let himself in by his latch-key, and went upstairs to his own chambers.

Arrived there, he lit his lamp, placed it on a large circular table in the middle of the room, and unlocking a safe, drew from it a ledger, certain pages of which he studied with deep interest. It was after midnight when he locked the ledger up again, and paced once or twice along the room with his hands behind him.

"It is almost time," he thought, "that the decisive step should be taken. Almost time! But I have not had patience for so many years, to be precipitate now." He took up his lamp, and retired to his bedroom, where he began to undress. Suddenly he drew himself bolt upright, and sounded his chest with his knuckles, bending his head to listen at each tap. "Why, you are sound enough," he said aloud, "to live till ninety." Then he drew the lamp to the side of a looking-glass, and steadfastly regarded his features. He was not a handsome man, and never had been, and from the strange contortions he made before the mirror, he did not seem to be engaged in any search for facial beauties now. "You look hardy and robust, my friend," he said, speaking aloud again; "but you may be unsound somewhere for all that. Consult a doctor, my friend—consult a doctor." He sat for a minute or two, nodding absently at his own reflection in the mirror, and inwardly repeating this fragment of advice. Then he arose, finished his disrobing, turned down the lamp, and went to bed. No compunction for the widowed wife disturbed his

dreams. It was natural, perhaps, that Garling, who lived so much among it, should dream of money. Natural or not, he dreamed of it; dreamed of it in orderly piles of glittering rouleaux, in stacks of crisp bank-notes, in shelving heaps of wonderful broad pieces, looking as if—as in Chaucer's story—a cart of gold had overturned its load. No man is responsible for his dreams, and if Garling in his visions knew that all this money was not his, and yet counted it over, and hugged it, and rolled in it, and meant to keep it, that fact surely left no tarnish on the bright honesty of his waking hours. Garling had had millions through his hands, and his books had never once been out by so much as a halfpenny.

His dreams caused him no uneasiness when he awoke and remembered them; but before dressing, he went through the singular pantomime of the evening with some extensions, tapping and sounding himself all over the body, and listening with great intentness. "You are sound enough," he said at the close of this examination, "to live to be a hundred!" He dressed, as he always dressed, with scrupulous neatness, breakfasted at his customary coffee-house, and walked solemnly to business. At mid-day he took a cab to the complete amazement of the messenger seated in the hall. The messenger had known him for a score of years, and had never seen him do such a thing before. The cab bore Garling to the residence of a well-known physician, who—the stream of morning patients having run dry—was in the act of buttoning his gloves in the hall, preparatory to a drive to such patients as could not visit *him*.

"I can give you five minutes," said the man of science. Mr. Garling nodded, to signify that that would serve his turn, and followed into the consulting-room.

"I want to know," said the cashier, "how long I may reasonably hope to live." The physician opened his eyes gently, and raised his eyebrows with something of an air of protest. "I am a lonely man," said Mr. Garling. "If I sink all I have in an annuity calculated for twenty years, am I likely to see the limit of the time, or ought I to make the calculation briefer?"

The physician went to work. He pressed Garling here. Did that hurt him? Not a bit. He pressed him there. Did that hurt him? Not at all. He listened to his breath-

ing—he listened to the beating of his heart—he asked half a dozen direct and simple questions.

"You are as sound as a roach," said the physician. "There is nothing less certain than the duration of life; but there is every chance that old age may square accounts with you."

"My life," said Garling questioningly, "is worth more than twenty years?"

"In all probability—yes," said the physician. "There is a long chapter of accidents, and no man can be sure."

"Of course not," responded Garling; and paying his fee, he buttoned up his coat, and went by cab to his chop-house, returning to business afoot at the usual hour.

He sat late at the offices that night, with the big ledger before him. His elbows rested on its leaves, and his hands made blinkers for his eyes, and kept his face a secret. And his dreams of last night were with him, and waking dreams of power and luxury that went beyond them.

"Twenty years to live it out in," said Garling, in an almost voiceless whisper—"*twenty years!*"

CHAPTER VI.

"HALF A MILLION OF MONEY IS SOMETHING CONSIDERABLE."

Mr. Jolly senior was not a wealthy man, as times go, and his daughter Constance was a trouble to him. The new resident at the Grange had a great faculty for laying on other people's shoulders the burdens which belonged to his own; but there was no one to whom he could so relegate Constance. Mr. Jolly characterized his daughter as "a reasonably good-looking sort of girl," and expected her to marry some day; and he sighed for that day's arrival as the Arab pilgrim sighs for the desert well. If he committed extravagances, they were condoned by conscience as necessary preparations for Constance's settlement, though he did penance for every one of them in bilious growlings. The Grange itself was a matrimonial fly-trap. Horses, carriages, servants were matrimonial lures. Mr. Jolly hated keeping house, and pined for his deserted chambers in the Albany. But Constance must have a basis for her operations, and

the Grange served. If she succeeded in hooking nobody during the off-season, a town house must be taken, and her father groaned to think of the expenses.

Mr. Jolly was a proud man too, and in spite of all his growling, would not have things done meanly. His was not the pride of wealth, for he had little. It was not the pride of intellect, for he had less. It was not the pride of birth, for he had no glorious ancestry to boast of, and was merely the eldest son of a country gentleman, and the descendant of many country gentlemen of small note in their own day, and no remembrance after it! Mr. Jolly's pride was centered in himself. He was proud of himself for being himself, and might have been puzzled to have found a better reason. Some of his friends had told him that he ought to be proud of his daughter; so he became a little prouder of himself, if that were possible, for having such a daughter. He was not proud of anything but himself; but if he owned anything that another man would have been proud of, it swelled his own consequence in his own eyes. Yet, it was curious to notice that with all his pride he fawned upon a title as few men in this favored country and in these republican times can find it in their hearts to do.

The father's condition of mind was not unfavorable to Gerard's chances—if Gerard could have known. The only son of a wealthy British merchant was not to be despised as a possible husband for Constance; and Mr. Jolly had booked Gerard in the tablets of his memery with half a score of others more or less eligible. Gerard was unknown to trade—the senior Lumby had almost altogether withdrawn from active participation in it; it was rumored on the best authority that the firm was wealthy even amongst wealthy London firms. There was nobody in the county—excepting a middle-aged bachelor baronet of very old family, and a young lord whose title had begun with his father—the contemplation of whose possible advances so filled Mr. Jolly with pleasant hopes. And Gerard, before three months had gone over his head after that memorable chance meeting in the lane, had given ample evidence of his enslaved condition. Sir Fawdry Fawdry made no advances, though he permitted his admiration to declare itself openly. That youthful nobleman, Lord Solitair, came and went, seeming uncertain of his own mind, if indeed he

could be said to have a mind, and finally retired "resigned" like Carlyle's Blumine, "to wed some richer."

All the while our stricken Gerard, after the manner of lovers, looked with a desponding eye upon his own chances, and regarded all men as rivals. The summer and the harvest went by, and winter grew on apace. Then came the hunting season; and Constance rode to the meet now and again with her father, and Gerard's opportunities increased. He was shy, the poor Gerard, and would not and could not run after his sweetheart as a bolder man would have done, so that he was compelled to trust much to cunningly devised accidents for occasional meetings. Constance did not follow the hounds; and Gerard, compelled to leave her side when the fox broke cover, was unhappy, and found no great joy even in "the chase," keenest of pleasures hitherto.

"My dear," said Mr. Jolly, staidly riding homeward from the meet at his daughter's side, "I am very favorably impressed with young Lumby—very favorably impressed indeed."

"Don't you think he's a little *gauche*, papa?" asked Constance.

Mr. Jolly smiled, his brown withered face wrinkling like old parchment. "Perhaps so, my dear—perhaps so," said he, and jogged on, smiling still. "You at least may have a right to think so."

"Why should I think so more than another?" asked Constance.

"There are conditions," said Mr. Jolly, his eyes wrinkling in a still broader smile, "under which young men invariably appear a little awkward."

Constance looked round upon him with a glance of some impatience; but she answered smoothly enough: "You are quite incorrigible. You are as fanciful as a match-making old lady."

Her father instantaneously became serious. "Have I ever been mistaken?" he asked. "Have I been once at fault?"

"You were mistaken," said Constance, tossing her pretty head disdainfully, "about Sir Fawdry Fawdry. You were at fault about Lord Solitair."

"My dear," returned Mr. Jolly, "I only profess to read symptoms. I do not profess to be a prophet. Sir

Fawdry and young Solitair were both deeply smitten—but—"

"Nonsense!" said Constance ungraciously.

"But," pursued her father, disregarding this interjection, "people marry nowadays for money. Your face is your fortune, Constance. At least it is the better part of it, and men know it. Your brother Reginald must be provided for. By all law and justice, I am bound to deal well by Reginald. And you, my dear, must do as well as you can. Meantime, I am favorably impressed with young Lumby—very favorably impressed indeed."

"Very well, papa," returned Constance; "we shall know in time. I am not skilled in the reading of symptoms; but this affair will probably end like the rest."

"My dear," cried her father, "you are ridiculous—positively ridiculous. One would think, to hear you talk, that, instead of being in the very freshness of your youth, you were an old woman, and had had a life of disappointments."

"Papa," said Constance severely, as one whose mind was made up past altering, "the days of romance are gone and over. Sir Crœsus Crœsus marries Lady Midas, a fat widow with a lap-dog, and admires the poor pretty Phyllis from a safe distance."

"And what becomes," asked Mr. Jolly, "of poor pretty Phyllis?"

"That depends," said Constance. "Perhaps a Gnome from Staffordshire, or a Cyclops from Wales, runs away with her—that is, if she is lucky; perhaps, if she is silly enough, she marries Corydon, and lives in a cottage, and cultivates the virtues of cottage life—envy and ill-temper and vicious headache. Perhaps Corydon jilts her—being wise in time—and marries Lady Crœsus, a second time widowed."

"And so, Romance is born again," said Mr. Jolly with his wrinkled smile.

"For Lady Crœsus," said Constance. "And there is the moral of my song, papa."

"Which is—?"

"That when you have married twice for money, you may, if you have survived that double ordeal, marry once for liking.

"And so, Romance is born again," said her father a

second time. "It is impossible," he quoted, with a dim remembrance of his classic days, "to expel Nature even with a pitchfork." Constance laughed, and they rode on a little while in silence. "You don't dislike young Lumby, do you?" he asked at the close of this pause, turning a somewhat anxious face upon her.

"No," she answered carelessly. "He is well enough." Then there was another pause.

"My dear," said Mr. Jolly, in a confidential tone, pressing his horse so near to hers, that his knee touched the off-side flap of her saddle, "young Lumby can not have less finally coming to him than half a million. Even in these days of huge fortunes, half a million of money is something considerable." Mr. Jolly, like many men of limited income, had permitted himself to think of colossal fortunes more than was altogether wholesome for him, and his tone in speaking of money was always large and unconcerned. He thought of "a few odd millions" like a Chancellor of the Exchequer, and would speak of them in the same vein.

"Considerable indeed," returned Constance, who in monetary matters was severely practical.

"He is richer than Sir Fawdry," said her father, "and probably as well to do as young Solitair."

Mr. Jolly's veneration for the aristocracy naturally displayed itself in familiarity. I have no desire to be obscure. Let me explain. Mr. Jolly in a lord's presence fawned upon the lord; but in the lord's absence, he used his name in an every-day fashion, to feed his own sense of his own importance. And a lesser reverence than his own for lordship could not have made the title seem important enough to do that. Therefore—so complicated a thing is snobbery—a most genuine reverence and worship bred a sometime seeming irreverence of speech. I am sometimes almost persuaded that if our House of Peers could guess the sum of snobbery which their presence creates among us, they would of their own free act abolish themselves, and spare the country much republican oratory.

"Papa," said Constance, "there is a vulgar fable about an old woman who counted her chickens before they were hatched. But," she added, smiling again, "the wisdom of our ancestors is wasted upon you—altogether wasted. You were counting already, you stupid dear, what could be done with half a million. I know you were."

Mr. Jolly absolutely blushed. That had been indeed the mental effort of the moment, and he had seen his daughter enthroned in Lumby Hall, and himself freed of all anxieties. "One counts many unhatched chickens," said he, recovering himself. "It is the privilege of mankind to hope. When I see you settled, my dear," he added, almost with pathos, "I can die in peace."

"Pray," said Constance, "make the settlement less remote."

The satire of this feminine thrust was too subtle for Mr. Jolly, but in the fullness of hope he took a more cheerful tone. "Crœsus is coming along, my dear—plain Mr. Crœsus; but not much the worse for that, after all."

"Crœsus," said Constance, "will marry Lady Midas, as already arranged."

"And Phyllis?" said her sire, reverting to the former parable.

"And Phyllis will die an old maid." There was not a creature in sight in all the widespread fields. A hundred yards away, the lane in which they rode dipped suddenly with a curve, and the hedge rose high, thick with prickly holly-leaves and red berries. The air was as blithe and soft as that of a spring day. "A southerly wind and a cloudy sky," with rifts of soft blue in it, and the fresh, gentle breath of the soil, and once or twice across the fields the tongue of the distant pack proclaimed it a hunting morning. "Phyllis," said Constance, roguishly, "will die an old maid." And there, in the complete loneliness of fields, she began to sing:

> "Ilka lassie has a laddie;
> Nane, they say, ha'e I;
> But a' the lads they smile at me
> When comin' through the rye."

Her voice was just as perfect as her face—a very rich and mellow mezzo-soprano, not of so rare a type as her beauty, but as perfect of its kind. Now, it happened, as if set there as a warning to all young ladies against the practice of singing in the open air, which, though natural to youth and good spirits, is opposed to the dictates of fashionable reserve—it happened that a young man stood at that moment in the hollow beyond the high hedge of holly. He had alighted from his horse, and was anxiously inspect-

ing a hoof, and making himself a little muddy in the process, when the first notes of the sweet voice struck upon his ear. He raised himself, let go the horse's foot, and listened. The little carol was sung with exquisite grace and archness, and the young man smiled.

"If your face matches your voice," he said to himself, "you won't have to mourn long, young lady." When the voice ceased, the sound of hoof-beats on the soft road became audible; and down the slope and round the bend in the lane came Mr. Jolly and his daughter. Now, no man can paint in words a pretty woman; and even Leigh Hunt's charming apology for failure will not greatly help him:

> "Let each man fancy, looking down the brow
> He loves the best, and thinks he sees it now."

For some of us have loved homely women in our time—what a provision of Nature that is to be thankful for!—and have found a beauty beyond beauty, in plain faces. But if no word-painter can show you a reliable, recognizable portrait of a pretty girl, what is to be done when he comes to actual loveliness? What can he do beyond pleading the inutility of his art—its utter helplessness? Yet, I would fain give you some semblance to the picture to carry in your mind. Fancy, then, a form—not too Juno-like, but ripe and round—clad in a habit of black broadcloth, with scarcely a crease or wrinkle from the waist upward; a form which swayed with the horse's motion, and yet preserved a sense of firmness—the little gloved hands low down with a look of mastery at rest; the little hat raking forward slightly, with an air not altogether coquettish, on a head altogether stately, with one superb knot of living gold behind; a face charming in all its lines, and fresh with hues of health and airs of heaven, and on the face a little touch of fun, of pride, of wonder—a startled look, with hauteur and humor in it, at remembrance of the song and the sudden encountering of this unexpected stranger. And beneath this vision, a steed of price, who bore the lady as though he loved her and were proud of her, with high stately step, free yet mincing, like a cavalier in a minuet. This was the sight which broke on the eyes of Valentine Strange, when Constance and her father—whom, by the way, you may if you choose, leave out of the picture—

came dancing round the holly hedge at the bend of the lane.

Val raised his hat. "I beg your pardon," he said, addressing Mr. Jolly, "but my horse has caught a stone, and gone dead-lame. I see that you have a hoof-picker on your saddle; and I should be awfully obliged if you would lend it to me for a moment. I'm sure I'm very sorry to detain you."

"Not at all," said Mr. Jolly, fumbling at the strap which held the hook, with his gloved fingers.

"Allow me," said Val; and possessing himself of the hoof-picker, deftly whipped out the stone from the horse's hoof, and restored the little implement to its place with a cordial "Thank you."

"Not at all," said Mr. Jolly, once more with great majesty. Constance had ridden on during this pause, and was perhaps two hundred yards ahead, when Mr. Jolly, returning Val's salute, rode on again, and in a little space overtook her. Mr. Strange meantime having inspected all his gearing, remounted, and went rocketing up the lane in pursuit.

"What a beauty!" said Val to himself. "I must have another look at her." Reaching the lady and her father, he flourished off his hat once more, and drew in his horse to a walk. Want of self-possession had never been among Val's failings. "Immensely obliged to you, sir," he said. "It was a most fortunate thing for me that you came by just then."

Mr. Jolly bowed, and branched off at a lane which bore to the left. "Good-morning," from Mr. Jolly.

"Good-morning. And again, thanks," from Val.

CHAPTER VII.

"OH," SAID GERARD, "THAT'S JOLLY'S SISTER."

DURING the foregoing brief colloquy, Mr. Strange had kept his eyes upon the lady's face, and had confirmed his first impression of her beauty. Constance was not unaware of his glance—(what young woman would have been?)—and Val's aspect was not unpleasing. He was evidently a gentleman; and then Constance, who was as little vain as most really beautiful women really are, remembered that his

horse's head had been turned in the direction from which she herself had come, and she knew perfectly well that he had followed for the express purpose of looking at her once more. Men often did that sort of thing. And she had no especial resentment for it. Feminine human nature likes to be admired; and, for that matter, even the very ugliest male amongst us is not superior to the feeling.

Mr. Jolly had no sooner settled in the county, than he had begun to inform himself of the position and expectations of every eligible *parti* within its limits—as indeed became a father who was anxious that his daughter should be happily settled and out of his way. In the course of his researches, he had lighted on the fact of the existence of one Valentine Strange, who was reputed to be the wealthiest man of those parts, an orphan whose great estates had been nursed through a long minority by guardians careful of his interests, and who now had undisputed control of his own. Mr. Jolly had made inquiries about Valentine Strange, and had learned that he was a bachelor of marriageable age, and not unlikely to marry, and had even discovered at last that the said Valentine was a friend of his own son's. He had especially desired that Valentine Strange should be made free of his house; but that young gentleman having perversely gone away a-yachting, there was no more to be said about the matter, and such matrimonial traps as could fairly be laid must be laid in his absence. Mothers with marriageable daughters, and they only, will be able to sympathize with Mr. Jolly. He had no wife to plot and plan for him. He had all a fond father's desire to see his daughter happily established; and apart from that, the girl was an expense and a nuisance. Therefore, he would have been sorely vexed could he have guessed that to-day he had dismissed the wealthy Mr. Strange, the marriageable Mr. Strange, so cavalierly.

Mr. Jolly had his grand manner, and when he assumed it, he was as frosty as Mont Blanc, being of opinion that to be icy was to be majestic. He had assumed his grand manner now, and fancied that the stranger of the morning's ride had gone away in deep reverence of spirit. Perhaps Mr. Jolly was less majestic than he thought himself—perhaps Val was an unusually irreverent young man. His mind was occupied with a pleasanter theme than Mr. Jolly's manner. The appearance of Constance did not strike

him as it had struck Gerard Lumby. The two young men were totally different in nature and manners. Gerard had a knightly tenderness and respect for all women, and had scarcely ever kissed any feminine lips but his mother's. He would have done any hard and dangerous thing rather than have been forced to pay a direct compliment to a young woman. To him, women seemed more than human—even a house-maid had a nimbus about her, a sort of protecting something which overawed him. But Val, in any fresh country house, knew every petticoated soul within it in a week, and made love to all of them in a way—hostess, daughters, guests, maids in service, with a fine merry indifference which won the female heart. And he did not worship—but prided himself on understanding—the sex; showing thereby his own weakness and folly. Here and there—after years of close and tender intercourse, broken by the rubs of life, made sweet by birth, and holy by death of little children—one man learns to understand one woman; but to strive to sum the sex were a vain arithmetic, though a man had the years of Methuselah in which to perform it.

Val rode away admiring, but by no means subdued. The encounter had taken place within a couple of miles of Lumby Hall, and he was on his way thither to surprise Gerard. And it chanced that Gerard was back in time to be surprised; for no sooner had the hounds thrown off, than there came a check; and the young fellow, after sitting disconsolately on horseback for some five minutes, waiting for the hounds to recover scent, felt the "blind boy's buttshaft" so rankle in him, that he turned, and rode almost savagely homeward, sorely troubled by the beauty of the incomparable Constance all the way.

"Ahoy!" cried Val, discerning Lumby's figure before him in the road.

"Why, Strange, old man," said Gerard, reining in as Val came plunging up, "you look like a Red Indian. Have you circumnavigated the world yet?"

"Not yet," said Val. "The fact is that when we got to Calais—we went there first, you know—Gilbert had a plan. Gilbert's a wonderful fellow at a programme, and his notion was that we might send the yacht down to Trieste—"

"Trieste?" cried Gerard.

"And that we might join it there. So we had a fortnight in Paris, and a fortnight in Vienna, and a fortnight in Venice: and then we got aboard again, and went to Naples. Charming place, Naples. Lots of pleasant people there."

"Stay there long?" asked Gerard.

"Well," answered Val, with a little laugh, "I've only just got back. Gilbert met a fellow, and wanted to go coasting round everywhere. So I let him go; and they went to Athens and Smyrna and Corfu, and all sorts of places. Then they called for me: and we have just come up, past Gibraltar and across the 'Bay of Biscay, Oh,' to Southampton—and here I am."

"And when are you off again?"

"Don't be in a hurry to get rid of me," said Val. "I shall cruise again in the summer, I dare say; but I'm not going to brave the dangers of the wintery deep in a cockle-shell any more."

"Shall you stay for the hunting?" asked Gerard. He was afraid that Strange would see his idol. He was afraid of everybody, distrustful of himself, despairing of success, and spiritually sore all over.

"Now, did you ever know me hunt?" Val asked, in almost an injured tone. "Am I the man to risk my bones for nothing? I hate to make a toil of a pleasure. I am not ambitious to go about with a crutch. I have no yearning to be trepanned."

"Then what shall you do?" asked Gerard. "What's the good of being in the country if you do not hunt?"

"I don't know," responded Strange. "It's a bore to have plans." Then Val began to tell of his adventures; and they reached the house, and sought Gerard's den together. Above the mantel-piece, framed in violet-colored velvet, was a colored cabinet portrait of Constance, which Gerard had begged from Milly. Strange stood with his elbows on the marble slab and examined it critically. Gerard, observing him, endured a ridiculous pang of jealousy.

"Who is she?" asked Val, with his head on one side, smiling at the picture through eyes half closed.

"Whom do you mean?" returned the disingenuous Gerard, feigning to be busy in the attempt to open a cigar-cabinet.

"The lady here. I met her in the lane this morning on horseback, escorted by an old-Indian sort of man."

"Oh," said Gerard, with mighty unconcern, "that's Jolly's sister."

Strange, standing a little back, began to spout Bassanio's speech:

What find I here?
Fair Portia's counterfeit? What demi-god
Hath come so near creation? Move these eyes?
Or whether, riding on the balls of mine,
Seem they in motion? Here are severed lips
Parted with sugar breath; so sweet a bar
Should sunder such sweet friends. Here, in her hair
The painter plays the spider, and hath woven
A golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men
Faster than gnats in cobwebs: but her eyes—
How could he see to do them? having made one,
Methinks it should have power to steal both his,
And leave itself unfurnished.

"What's all that rubbish about?" asked Gerard roughly. At these hyperbolic praises, a keen pang of jealousy ran through him. Who had a right to praise her?

"The rubbish was given to the world by the Swan of Avon," said Strange, "and Jolly's sister's portrait is worthy the praise."

"Never mind the Swan of Avon," said Gerard. "Do you think of going back to Naples?"

So they drifted into talk again; but Strange could not or would not cease to admire the portrait.

"I say, Lumby," he said at length, "tell young Jolly I'm back again when you see him next; "and bring him over to my place, and have a day or two with me." He was standing again before the portrait when he said this; and a sudden resolve passed through Gerard's mind, and made him tingle all over. Late that night, when Strange had gone, and Gerard was in his own room alone, he gave words to this resolve:

"I can't afford to waste a day. I will speak to-morrow." His heart beat against his side, and he trembled. What a thing is love! It was only a quarter of a year since he had first seen her, and without her life seemed not worth the living. Whatever of spiritual loveliness his manly heart and honest nature could conceive, with that he dowered her. He worshiped at her shrine with such sacrifices as

such men offer, whilst she sat with dreamy eyes over a book in her little boudoir at the Grange, and looked, as he figured her, an inspiration for painter and poet. But we know what Portia's golden casket held. Constance was thinking of Gerard, and weighing the chances of his coming, and her pulse beat evenly, and her bosom was unmoved.

CHAPTER VIII.

"MY DEAR," SAID MR. JOLLY, "I TOLD YOU SO."

GERARD arose haggard, and looking like a murderer, to his own distempered fancy, as he regarded himself in the glass. All night long he had tossed to and fro, acting over and over again the drama of to-morrow. He was a thousand times rejected in the prophecies of these terrible waking dreams. In sweet, tumultuous moments he was accepted. Once or twice came the fancy that he was loved in turn; but there seemed, somehow, an irreverence in it, almost a desecration. True love is humble, and Gerard's love was true. All night long he tossed, and dreamed his waking dreams; and though sometimes his heart defied Fate, and manly courage reasserted itself, for the most part he trembled at the thought of the ordeal before him, and the augury of his visions was evil. At the breakfast-table his looks alarmed his mother; and he was so self-absorbed during the meal and eat so little, that at its close she followed him to his own private room with matronly solicitude.

"It is only your mother," she said, when Gerard opened the door in answer to her rapping. "Gerard, my dear, what have you been doing to look so unwell? You have overexerted yourself, Gerard. You ride too much, I am sure."

Gerard laughed, and set back his broad shoulders. "There's nothing amiss with *me*, mother."

"Let me look at your tongue," she said.

Gerard laughed again, and answered lightly, "I am beyond the 'Simple Herbal,' mother." Mrs. Lumby, out of that precious volume, dosed the village children.

"I am sure it's furred, Gerard. I can tell it is by your

complexion and the look of your eyes. *And* red at the edges, Gerard."

He drew her to his side and kissed her. "You're a good old mother, aren't you? There's nothing the matter with me. I'm as tough as a whipcord, and as hard as nails."

"Then, Gerard," said the old lady, standing still within his embrace, and looking gravely up to him; "then, Gerard, you are disturbed in mind." The big Gerard looked down at her gently, and kissed her again. But she would have been no mother if she had not seen the blush upon his cheek. "In mind or body, Gerard, you *are* disturbed. And it's of no use to kiss me in that hypocritical way if you won't tell me what's the matter with you."

"I have had rather a bad night," Gerard confessed.

"I knew it!" said Mrs. Lumby, in a sort of lugubrious triumph. "You have had many bad nights lately. There is something on your mind." And without knowing it, she went to work on what philosophers call the exhaustive method. "Is it money, Gerard? Because, if it is—"

"No," he said; "it isn't money. It's insomnia."

"Have you quarreled with any of your friends?"

"My dear old mother," said Gerard, "I haven't quarreled with anybody." He was hypocritical enough to kiss her again at this juncture.

"Have you been making a book on that dreadful Derby?" inquired Mrs. Lumby.

"The dreadful Derby was run six months ago," said Gerard in reply; "and I never make books."

"Then, Gerard," she said, "is it what I think it is?"

"How can I tell?" asked guilty Gerard, blushing to the eyes.

"Gerard!" she cried, "I see it now! I guessed it a long time ago. And, O Gerard, not to tell me! Who is it? Is it Miss Jolly?" And here the young man was fairly trapped, and looked as guilty as any small boy caught in the act of pilfering sweetmeats. The question has been asked before—But why *does* a man who is in love look ridiculous? Young women under kindred circumstances, according to such limited observations as I have been able to make, look superangelic, and make the men, by very force of contrast, look the foolisher. "It *is* Miss Jolly!" said Mrs. Lumby, turning from inquiry to asseveration. "Don't make love to me, Gerard. I am not going to forgive you

—yet. And how long has this been going on, without your saying one word to me about it?"

"There hasn't been anything going on at all," protested Gerard. "I've—I've scarcely spoken to her."

"But you are going to," said Mrs. Lumby, with feminine keenness; "and that is what disturbs you." Gerard's face and attitude were sufficient for confession. "I suppose," she added, wiping her eyes, "that I am a silly old woman, and that I ought to have looked for it."

"Don't say that, mother," pleaded Gerard.

"And now," pursued Mrs. Lumby, "somebody else will be snapping Milly up, with such a fortune as your father can afford to give her, and I shall be left alone. Do you know what sort of an answer you will get?"

"No," said Gerard with a desperate sigh. "Don't ask me any more just now, mother; I'll tell you all about it when I have spoken."

"Are you going to the Grange to-day?" asked his mother anxiously.

"Yes," answered Gerard; "I am going this morning." And at that his mother gave him her blessing, and a pile of good advice for which he had no ears.

An hour or two later he rode away, his mother watching the well-set, broad-shouldered figure out of sight, and following him and his suit with hopes that were almost prayers, and yet with a sinking at the heart. Here once more was Time's lever at work, forcing a way into the joints of family masonry, and rendering stone asunder from stone. She said nothing to her husband; but she told all to Milly; and Milly soothed her, and having quite succeeded in restoring her to cheerfulness, went away to her own room and cried for an hour. This is woman's way. Heaven remembers those hidden and unselfish tears.

Meantine, the object of all this solicitude rode sadly, unable to pluck up heart of grace at all. "It's like my cheek," he said, for he was not used to clothe his thoughts in poetic language—"its like my cheek to think that she will look at me twice. But I can't help it; and I couldn't help it if I were a crossing-sweeper, and she were a queen. I think the more distance between us, the more I should—the worse I should be." He could not finish the sentence, even to himself, by the simple words "love her," because of the presumption it seemed, and the holy thing his

passion as yet was to him. Then he suddenly bethought himself—for he had laid no plans as yet and scarcely knew his way at all—that in the first instance it would be his duty to face, not Constance, but her father, and at that thought his fallen courage rose a little. No angelic majesty sat enthroned on Mr. Jolly's crinkled forehead, even for Gerard. The stake was no less than it had been; but the young fellow felt more equally matched with the father than with the maiden. So he put in spurs, and galloped on in altered mood; but when he came within sight of the house, flaring courage fell again, and it seemed only a dogged despair that prompted him to go through with his cause and have it over. When he had passed the lodge, his heart came into his throat with a great bound, for there he saw Mr. Jolly walking with Constance at his side. He threw himself from his horse and approached on foot.

"My dear," said Mr. Jolly, in an undertone, on first beholding Gerard, "I told you so."

Constance said nothing just then, but received Gerard with a radiant smile. But her wonderful eyes were always radiant, and there was no gladness at his arrival or tenderness for him withim them. Mr. Jolly called a gardener who was sweeping one of the paths, and bade him take the horse; and Constance, with another charming smile and an inclination of her head, took a wordless leave and walked into the house. Her beautiful face was framed in the soft white of a woollen cloud, and to Gerard she looked more ravishing than ever. Her father wisely gave the young fellow time to gather mental breath, and talked of anything meanwhile—the weather, the hunting, the terrible price of hay.

"I have come thus early, Mr. Jolly," Gerard began, "because I wish to speak to you of a matter of the most urgent importance to myself." His voice was shaky, and there was a pallor beneath the brown upon his face.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Jolly, with beautiful innocent simplicity. One can almost fancy him dressed as a shepherd *d la Watteau* in an Arcady where nobody ever grows old, and where, as a consequence, there are no fathers to consult about love-making, he was so charmingly ignorant of Gerard's motive.

"I will come to the point at once," said Gerard. He paused, however, long enough to give Mr. Jolly time to say

"Yes," in a manner all suave, half assenting and half inquiring. "I love your daughter, and I am here to ask your leave to tell her so." That was Gerard all over. When he had a thing to say, he said it with no verbal beating of bushes.

Mr. Jolly knew pretty well what was coming; but this curt announcement almost took his breath away. It was like a cold *douche*. He walked on mechanically for half a minute before he could reply. "Mr. Lumby," he said then, "this is a little sudden, and—and unexpected. The manner of your avowal bespeaks sincerity, genuine sincerity." He walked on a little further, the wooer pacing at his side. "Our acquaintence, Mr. Lumby, has not been a long one; but this sort of affair goes on rapidly whilst we old people are asleep. My daughter knows nothing of your wishes?" His innocence was quite Arcadian.

"Nothing," answered Gerard.

Mr. Jolly, holding the tip of his chin daintily between his finger and thumb, looked meditatively upon the gravel at his feet. "M-m-m!" said Mr. Jolly, with an aspect of reflection. "Your parents, Mr. Lumby—are they aware of your intentions?"

"I told my mother this morning," said Gerard, with great simplicity! "I haven't spoken to my father yet. I shall—on my return."

"Amongst people in *our* position," said Mr. Jolly, "marriage is a serious matter. Everything should be above board. There should be no reservations. I need not tell you, Mr. Lumby, that I know nothing of my daughter's feelings, and that I can not even pretend to sound them. Only a mother can undertake so delicate an office, and my poor child was deprived early of a mother's care. For myself, I can only promise to throw no opposition in your way, provided that your father's explicit assent is given. Beyond that I can not go, at present."

"I can answer for my father," said Gerard. "He likes Miss Jolly very much; and in a matter like this he won't cross me."

"Consult him, Mr. Lumby—consult him," advised the Arcadian, with palms raised in gentle protest against Gerard's headlong wishes.

"Very well," said the impetuous Gerard. "I'll ride back now, and be here again in an hour."

"My dear Mr. Lumby," said the Arcadian, "I am an older man than you are, and I may perhaps, without too much presumption, venture to advise you."

"Surely," said Gerard.

"Thank you. Do not, in a matter of so much importance, act in too great haste."

"Mr. Jolly," said Gerard, speaking not without dignity, "I should be much more unworthy than I am, if I could take one step or speak one word about it, without being certain of myself at least, or without having weighed every word and counted every step beforehand."

"Mr. Lumby," said the Arcadian, quite moved, "I esteem your candor and your earnestness at their full value. And whatever termination this affair may find, this interview—the manner in which you have conducted a matter of this delicate nature—has added, I will say most highly, to my esteem for you."

"Thanks very much," said Gerard, with more placidity than he had hitherto been able to command. He was in love with Constance, not with her father, and he did not care to be patronized even then, and even by him. His tone declared as much quite plainly.

"Confound him!" said the Arcadian, inwardly, feeling a little discomfited. He kept his outward suavity, however, saw the lover remount, and waved him a friendly adieu. Once clear of the drive, away went Gerard like the wind, with the fresh air whistling past his ears, and a thousand sweet hopes stirring at his heart. He never drew rein till he reached home, when he dashed into the house like a messenger of war.

CHAPTER IX.

SHE ANSWERED "YES."

"HILLO! hillo!" cried Lumby senior, going lamely across the hall. "What's the matter, Gerard?"

"I'm in a bit of a hurry," said Gerard, cooling down a little. "I want to speak to you, that's all."

"It's worth no man's while to risk his neck to hear *me* talk," said Lumby senior, with a chuckle. "Come in, lad. What is it?" He sat in the big library chair: and Gerard having closed the door, walked up and down for a

minute or two, and then planting himself before his sire, he spoke:

"Father, I'm thinking about getting married."

"Ah," said Lumby, senior, with his features a little twisted by a sudden twinge of gout. "Is that a general or a particular statement? Is it an abstract sentiment, or is there a lady in the case already?"

"There is a lady in the case already."

"Who is it?"

"Miss Jolly," responded the lover, looking and feeling like a defiant criminal.

"Very good taste, my lad," said the elder man—"very good taste indeed. Don't tell your mother I said so; but if I were younger—A—ah! That isn't conscience, but the gout. Well?"

"I have spoken to her father this morning."

"The dickens you have!" said Mr. Lumby, with another facial distortion.

"He demands," pursued Gerard, "that your explicit consent shall be given before he can entertain my proposal."

"He demands that my explicit consent shall be given before he can entertain your proposal, does he? Gerard, your language is worthy of your university. An Oxford training has not been wasted on you. What do *you* want to get married for? Why, only the other day you were a legal infant. Gerard, my lad, keep clear of my plaguy foot and come here and shake hands. You had only to choose a lady to be sure of my consent. And I know she's pretty, and I know she's clever, and I think she's good. Go, and win her, my lad, and wear her worthily, and let your old dad nurse his grandchildren before he dies."

The old man was riper and mellower than the young one. As they shook hands, Gerard's look was a trifle sulky. He could not show emotion gracefully, and he was deeply moved. But the gripe of the young giant's fingers made his father's hand ache for five minutes afterward, and a good deal more love went into that hand-shaking, from both sides, than some very fluent people ever know in all their lives. So, bearing the paternal as well as the maternal blessing, the wooer rode once more away. He went gallantly this time, riding like a lover. Could he fail to win with such good auguries behind him?

"My dear Constance," said Mr. Jolly, entering the room

in which his daughter sat, "Mr. Lumby has honored me by a formal proposal for your hand."

"And you," said Constanoe, who had watched the interview from her window, "have sent him about his business?"

"Yes," said her father, with his wrinkled smile. "His business is to obtain his father's consent. I have no doubt of his attachment to you; that has been evident from the first; but as I told him, in a matter of this kind, everything must be above-board, and I could not dream of allowing my consent or yours to be extorted, until all things were made clear on his side."

"And when he comes back, I am to say 'Yes,' papa?" asked Constance.

"My dear," said Mr. Jolly, shrugging his shoulders ever so little, "I am not an ogre, or a wicked father in a novel in the 'Young Ladies' Tea-table Gazette.' You will exercise your judgment. Mr. Lumby, armed with his father's consent, will seem to me a most desirable and eligible husband." He spoke of Gerard as an auctioneer speaks of a family mansion.

Constance sighed faintly. "I think he is a good man, papa," she said; "and I know he is very much attached to me. But" (Mr. Jolly shrugged his shoulders again a little more pronouncedly)—"I like him too," she said—"but—"

"Once more, my dear," said Mr. Jolly, "I am not the wicked father of a cheap romance; but if you throw away such a chance as this, I shall think that you deserve never to have another."

"Very well, papa," said Constance; "I will do as you wish." He kissed her with unusual warmth and kindliness. "And now," she said, "let us say no more about it till the knight-errant comes."

The knight-errant was not long in coming. Soberly enough he came in sight; but there were evidences on gallant Rupert's sides which told of haste, and Gerard's absence had been marvelously brief.

"I have seen my father," he said to Mr. Jolly, "and I carry with me not merely his approval, but his warmest wishes."

"That smooths my way completely," said Mr. Jolly. "There remain only my daughter's wishes to consult.

And there, Mr. Lumby—let me be candid with you—I can exercise no influence, no control. You have my cordial good wishes. I can offer you nothing more." Again the Arcadian rather overdid it.

"Mr. Jolly," said Gerard, rather stiffly, "do me the justice to believe that I would not win by coercion, even if I could."

"I can't have a row with the fellow now," said the guileless shepherd, inly. "But when they're married, I sha'n't see much of them. I can go back to the Albany. It's the only decent place to live in." He added aloud: "Our sentiments are happily at one upon that matter. And now, Mr. Lumby, what is the next step? Shall I smooth your way at all by preparing my daughter to receive your proposal, and by telling her that you make it with my sanction? Or would you prefer to wait?"

"I don't think," said Gerard, "that there can be any advantage in delay."

"No?" asked Mr. Jolly, smilingly. "Well, perhaps not—perhaps not." Within himself he exulted. Constance had been a great anxiety to him. It was a big thing to book a young man with half a million in perspective—not quite the biggest thing the daughter of such a man as Mr. Jolly might have done, he thought, but eminently satisfactory. "Will you excuse me then?" Gerard, too much agitated for speech, inclined his head in answer; and Mr. Jolly left the room. "Constance," he said, himself a little shaken, "you have quite made up your mind?" She nodded with a faint smile. She had had no dream of love, but always until now there had been a hope that the dream might come and fulfill itself. And now? Well, Gerard was very nice and manly—she had little fault to find with him; but she did not love him. She would have liked to have loved her husband a little. As her father had said only the day before, Nature returns, even when expelled with a pitchfork. All her training had gone against marrying for love, and she had heard it condemned as silly, and even as sometimes wicked. She sighed a little, smiled a little at the sigh, and so surrendered. She arose, and surveyed her own regal and tender beauty in the mirror, regarding herself critically. Her bosom heaved with a passing sense of triumph, and as she turned, Gerard entered. She surveyed him demurely. A man at least, every inch of him. Not

a mere creature of the ball-room and the park. Now that she looked at him with this new interest, that he was to be her husband, she saw much to admire in him. She waved him to a seat; but he stood before her and pleaded his cause.

"Miss Jolly, your father has already prepared you for my visit?" Her bowed head bent a little lower in affirmation. "I am glad of that, for I should not have liked to startle you by my abruptness." A little smile flickered across the hidden features at this statement. Poor Gerard thought that this virgin fortress was here for the first time assailed. Constance remembered a score of such scenes, and almost the only difference between them and this was that she had always said "No," and was now to say "Yes." There was the least possible quiver of earnestness in his voice. "I suppose," he said, with unintentional quaintness, "to tell anybody straight out, 'I love you,' would be a little hard; and I think the truer it is, the harder it is." Constance, who was perfectly self-possessed, smiled again at this. The simplicity was manly; it even touched her a little. "If I speak clumsily, I will ask you to excuse me. I have only known you for three months, and that is but a little time. I should have laughed three months ago to think that such a love"—the word cost him a great and evident effort, and it was plain that it was sacred to him; the listener knew it—"could have grown in a man's heart in such a time. But it *has* grown there, and my life is in your hands. I ask a great thing—I ask a thing of which I know I am unworthy—I ask you to share my life with me. It shall be my continual study to make you happy." There his very earnestness broke him down.

"Mr. Lumby," said Constance—she could say nothing ungracefully, and though she was as cool as a cucumber, he thought she looked and spoke like a pitying angel—"you ask a great thing—a great thing on both sides. Let me ask a little one. Give me a day to think of your offer."

"Give me an answer now!" he pleaded. She was sitting before him looking upward, and for the first time in this interview he saw her eyes and looked into them. There is no exaggerating the matter—he was head over ears in love—and love, even in a man who means to be self-possessed, will have its way. The glance of the wonderful violet eyes brought him down upon one knee before her. One white

hand was stretched a little toward him. He took it in both his. "Give me an answer now!" he murmured, with pleading eyes fastened on her face—"give me an answer now!" This was a phase of love-making on which Constance had not counted, and it was new to her. The man was kissing one hand, and had possessed himself of the other—a prodigious and unheard-of situation. It was not unpleasant, though at first a little alarming. "Say Yes," said this audacious Gerard, murmuring with his breath upon her cheek, and both her hands in his. And it was wonderful and strange—if Nature were ever wonderful and strange—to see how the stronger male nature triumphed; for caught in this unexpected snare, wooed for once like a woman, by a man who loved her, in place of being talked to by an automaton as though she were an elegant wax-work, she answered "Yes;" and for one bewildered minute her head lay on Gerard's shoulder, and the first kiss that ever love had planted there was warm upon her lips. Then, fairly frightened at his impetuosity, she sprung to her feet, and escaped to think and wonder. And when she saw herself in the glass, she saw a more lovely creature reflected there than ever her mirror had shown her until now; for her eyes were all agleam, and her face was rosy, and there was a marvelous *new* look she had never seen before. And as she stood there, she made one utterly feminine remark aloud—a remark so womanly, that it startled her to know that it could have crossed her as a thought: "I ought to be a happy woman to be loved so much."

Was the dream to come after all? Was she, too, like the spurious heroines of romance, to have a husband whom she could love, and not merely tolerate?

The poor Gerard went home feeling criminal, and yet conscious of a certain sense of satisfaction. And after all, if a woman does not want to be kissed, what right has she to be downright bewitching? An unanswerable query.

CHAPTER X.

THE GHOST OF GARLING'S PAST.

GARLING, trusted cashier aad manager to the great house of Lumby, sat in his own apartments in Fleet Street. The streets outside were filled with fog, and the lamps

burned yellow in the haze. Voices of passers-by, footsteps, roll and roar and rumble of traffic by seething Temple Bar, came faintly, as though filtered through wool before reaching Garling's ears. There was a half extinguished fire upon the hearth, the red glaring with dying anger through gray ashes. At a large circular table, lighted by one shaded lamp, sat the secret man, his hands resting passively in the light, his face in darkness. Outside the circle of the shaded lamp, everything lay in doubled darkness; and shadows lurked behind the meager chairs, hiding in gloomy corners, as though, like Garling's face, they had drawn back from the tell-tale lamp. Muffled like the outer sounds, the voices of dead youth spoke through the fogs of many years. Unformed and indistinct, like the shadows in the corners of his room, the faces and figures known in that dead youth time moved before him. He had no wish or will to summon back the Past, but it flowed in upon him like a phantom tide. He could no more resist its coming than he could have swept back a real sea upon an actual beach. It rose about him with voices sad and terrible, and, as it were upon the crest of every phantom wave, old faces smiled or frowned again, and in the murmur of that tide of time old voices spoke.

Out of this mood he came into another, to which the first seemed but the natural prelude. Scenes came before him: gray, as in dreams, with no light upon them. And, indistinctly—as he saw the scenes—he heard the voices of those who acted in them, filtered through the fogs of years:

"You are going," said one phantom, "to the coast?"

"Yes," said another; "down to Devonshire."

The latter phantom was himself of three-and-twenty years ago; the other, a friend who died.

"I am uncertain where to go," said the voice of the first phantom, speaking in Memory's ear. "Shall I join you? Do you mind?"

"Come by all means," said the ghost of Garling's past; and the scene changed, yet the people were the same.

"I am recalled," said the shadowy friend, "and must return at once. I must travel hastily. You had better take my luggage on, and bring it back to town with you."

The scene changed again. His self that was, had alighted at a village inn alone. He saw the ghost of the coachman, the ghosts of a team of horses, the ghost of a coach, the

ghost of an old portmanteau. The portmanteau bore a name—E. MARTIAL—painted in white letters. There was an unsubstantial waiter on the scene, touching a shadowy forelock with a vague finger; "Your luggage, sir?"

"Yes," said the ghost of Garling's past; "mine." And so he was there as Mr. Martial. He had not thought of these things for years.

It was moonlight in the summer-time, and the gray waves vaguely seen were crumbling on the cliffs below. Roll and roar and rumble of traffic by seething Temple Bar came through the fog, and helped the picture, with noises as of the sea. His dead youth was here again.

"You love me well enough to trust me?"

"I love you better than any words that I can find will say."

Is this a care-worn woman, in a squalid room, with sewing on her lap, looking up at him as he enters? No. That was only a break in the vision, and the girl's face was fair—fair, with a tender bloom upon it; and in the eyes which turned to look in those of Garling's youth, the light of love. Passive, dull-eyed, sat Garling in his own room, pondering on this dream. Was there any touch of pity in him—any stirring of remorse?

A village church—a quiet wedding—a clergyman, quite blurred with fog of many years, was speaking; but ill-remembered though he may be, his voice was clear enough: "Wilt thou, Edward Martial, take this woman to thy wedded wife?" It was Garling's voice which answered, "I will:" his own hand traced the false name in the ghostly register. Garling's dead youth had kissed the bride, and the picture faded. Was there any touch of pity in him—any stirring of remorse?

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Suddenly, in one high corner of the room in which the cashier dreamed these dreams, a bell rang. Moving his hand in a startled way, he tilted the shade upon the lamp, and all the shadows that had lain behind him swept across the room, as the visions flitted from his mind. He threw open the door, wide, so that the lamp-light might fall upon the stairs without, and passed down them. "Who's there?" he cried.

A voice spoke through the letter-slip, and stirred the

little cloud of yellow fog that lingered round it. "I want to see Mr. Martial."

"Who are you? What do you want?" asked Garling ungraciously, as he opened the door. A tall figure stood in the fog, dimly visible by the light of a street lamp. The cashier, peering at him, made out that he was respectably attired. "What do you want?" he asked again.

"I want to see Mr. Martial," said the man. "Is that you, Mister?"

"Mr. Martial has gone away from here long since," said Garling.

"That's a pity," said the man. "His wife's dyin'. She sent me to this address—at least her daughter did."

"Come in."

The man entered, closing the door behind him, and followed the cashier upstairs. Garling turned round upon him there, as he stood full in the lamplight, looking at him for half a minute, and then replaced the shade of the lamp. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"I'm a lodger in Mrs. Martial's house."

"What's your name?"

"Hiram Search," replied the messenger. "What's yourn?"

Garling returned no answer to this query; but from under down-drawn brows regarded his visitor rather as if he looked beyond him than at him.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Martial is to be found?" asked Hiram.

"No," said Garling; "I can't."

"And wouldn't if you could," said Hiram to himself. The cashier's manner certainly conveyed that inference legitimately enough.

"How long," asked Garling, "has his wife been ill?"

"She's been ailing," Hiram responded, "for a long time; but she's only been real bad about a week."

"Who says she is dying?"

"Doctor," said Hiram, laconically. Neither of the two men liked the other. There was an instinctive antagonism between them. "Says she can't live the night out," he added.

"Go and call a cab," said the cashier.

"There's one outside," responded Hiram.

Mr. Garling drew on an overcoat, galoches and gloves,

wound a muffler about his throat, put on his hat, all gravely and deliberately, and then turned down the lamp. Hiram led the way down-stairs, and they entered the cab which waited at the door. "Drive straight back," said Hiram, "an' make haste."

Roll and roar as though a tide were rising near at hand. Spectral appearances and disappearances of red-eyed monsters, mistily discerned as hansom cabs, growing out of fog-like exhalations, and melting back again. Roll and roar of the unseen tide along noisy Fleet Street and loud Ludgate Hill and by echoing St. Paul's, and then a dulled quiet in Cheapside, as though the breakers had fallen into sudden frosty silence. Then from the asphalt to the stones again, with renewed bellowings of the unseen tide. Nothing seeming real to either of the travelers but themselves and the vehicle they sat in. Even the cab, verifying its existence by painful joltings, was drawn in quite a ghostly and unreal manner, by nothing but the phantom hind-quarters of a horse.

All this time Hiram speculated as to the identity of his companion, resolving now that he was the husband of the dying woman, and now that he was not. "If I know anything about human natur'," said Hiram to himself finally, "he's the sort of man who'd find lyin' come easy to him. Sooner lie than not, I fancy." He was most unfavorably impressed with Mr. Garling, and judged rashly. The cashier had, in point of fact, no preference either way, but told the truth or not, as it suited him.

The cab began to turn and twist amongst the narrow and ill-paved streets, and by and by drew up before a mean and dingy door. Even in the fog Garling knew it, and alighting, laid his hand upon the knocker; when Hiram seized him by the wrist, and whispering, "Gently does it," leaned above the area railings and tapped softly with his fingers at the window. "I've lent my latch-key to the nurse," he explained. In a moment, the girl who had answered Garling's summons on his former visit, opened the door, and stood aside for them to pass. She carried a candle, and, protecting the flame with her hand, threw its feeble light upon her own face. Garling stood still and looked at her for a second or two; and she returned his gaze with some astonishment, not unmixed with fear.

"You love me well enough to trust me?" It was the

phantom voice of an hour ago—the echo of the voice of his own dead past, sounding in Garling's ears.

"I love you better than any words that I can find will say." Question and answer murmured in his ear as he regarded her. She was the revival of what her mother had been. Was there any touch of pity in him—any stirring of remorse?

"Where is your mother?" he asked.

"She is waiting for you," the girl responded. "Come this way." Holding the candle aloft, she passed up the stairs, with the light shining down upon her hair, and making a halo upon it. Garling followed. The girl tapped at a chamber door, and a woman dressed in black opened it, and making a motion with her hand, as if to warn them both to silence, admitted them.

"Is she awake?" said Garling, in a hoarse under-tone.

The woman shook her head and whispered: "Sit down." She motioned to a chair, and Garling obeyed her.

The girl, still shading the candle with her hand, retired. One night-light burned feebly in the room, and the sleeper's face was shaded from it. The fire had died within the grate, and the air was cold, and tinted yellow with the fog. A clock in another room ticked irregularly, with a sort of broken gallop in its sound, as though Time were tired, and hastening with uncertain footsteps to its close. As Garling listened to it, it came suddenly to an end, leaving an ominous pause. Distant breakers on great London's shore rolled from silence into silence. The pale shadows of his waking dreams were back again; the thin voices murmured on his inward ear, "You love me well enough to trust me?" Again his own question. How had he repaid the trust he once invited?

The sleeper moved uneasily; and, rising, he drew the curtain a little to one side, and looked at her. Her face was pale, and held no resemblance to what it had been, or any remembrance of it. The change was chiefly of his making. He dropped the curtain noiselessly, and sat down. The distant breakers on great London's thoroughfare heaved slowly up, rolled over, and died again in silence, one by one. Any rustle of the nurse's dress was quite an episode. Any closing of a door in the street without, any passing footstep, or voice that said "Good-night," any ash

that shifted in the dead fire—took a weird importance. And so an hour went by, and the sleeper awoke.

"Has Mr. Search come back?" she asked feebly, with a pause between each word.

"Yes," said Garling; "and I am waiting here."

"Leave us alone," said the dying woman to the nurse, who bent above her. The nurse lingered, touching things here and there, and then retired, closing the door gently. "Come here, Edward. Let me see you."

"I am here," he responded, "in answer to your message."

"Edward, I am dying." He made no answer. "I never wronged you." The words "I know it" were almost on his lips, but he did not speak them. "I have no reproaches." She could say no more for very weakness.

"Is there anything," he asked, in a dry and husky voice, "that I can do?"

"Yes," she breathed looking at him with her bright sunken eye—"Mary."

"You wish me to take care of her?" The closing eyelids silently indicated, "Yes;" and he said coldly: "I will do it."

"Edward!" she breathed.

"Yes?" he answered in the same dry tone. The merest motion of her head beckoned him down, and he inclined his ear.

She murmured word by word: "I have forgiven everything." He never moved nor made a sign in answer. "If I did wrong—if I tired of you"—the words fell one by one and were barely audible—"forgive me now." Perhaps, if the inward voice had been less loud, he might have spoken. She raised her wasted hand to his cheek, and he started upright at her touch. It was the first caress from any hand which had been laid upon him for now many years, and it was harder to bear than even the inward voice of accusation. "Edward," she whispered, "kiss me." He bent stiffly down, and kissed her icily on the cheek. It was horrible to do it. Any pretense of love from him to her was such a lie, that even *he* revolted at it. She closed her eyes, and lay breathing faintly; whilst he stood looking down at her face, and listening to the noises of the streets. By and by he could hardly tell that she breathed at all, and creeping stealthily from the room and down the darkened

stairs, he knocked at the door of the lower apartment. It was opened by the girl who had admitted him to the house. He entered, and glanced about him. There were few changes. The table was still littered with cloths and the floor with shreds, and there was some unfinished sewing cast over the back of a chair. The nurse sat brooding at a dispirited fire, and looked up as he entered.

"Go to your patient," he said; and the woman, moving as if she resented the order, or disputed his right to give it, left the room. He turned upon the girl. "Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"My mother said after you came last time—" She was in evident dread of his eyes, and shrunk from him.

"Your mother said—what?" he demanded dryly.

"She said you were—my father."

"She has sent to me, upon her death-bed—" the girl clasped her hands with a look of terror—"to recommend you to my care. It is too late now to enter into the reasons which caused your mother and myself to part. I have promised that you shall be provided for; and if I find you dutiful and tractable, you shall be well provided for."

"Her death-bed?" cried the girl, as if all the rest had passed her by unheard.

"I shall be here again to-morrow between one and two o'clock," he coutinued. "You will then tell me what you need, and I shall make it my business to provide it." He might as well have spoken to the wind. She passed one hand across her eyes in a blind and vacant way, and looked at him with no discerning. He smoothed with his coat-sleeve the hat he held in his hand, and with a curt "Good-night," was gone.

The fog was denser than before, and the air had grown so raw, that though he was well wrapped up, and walked hurriedly, it chilled him to the bone. The ghostly and unreal semblance which everything bore in the fog, was in consonance with his mood, and was perhaps answerable for it. "I did not marry *that* thing," he muttered to himself, as the drawn face of his wife presented itself. He knew the vileness of that exculpation, and his thoughts goaded and irritated him. Dead Love, asking for some tenderness of pity, and being thus refused, brought fire instead of tears. He walked on, hurrying through the shadowy streets, carrying his own landscape with him, peopled with

its shadowy creatures. Admitting himself at length at his own door, he mounted the stairs and entered the half-lighted room. He had never been a nervous man, and never a coward until now; but there was such a chill of terror on him that his hand shook as he turned up the lamp. The shadows fleeting back from the growing light put him in mind of secret marauders hiding, and in great tremor, which not all his own scorn for it could subdue, he ranged over his two rooms, lamp in hand, examining every crevice, looking beneath the bed, and opening the curtains of the shower-bath which stood in one corner. The noises in the street were more subdued, for the hour was growing late. The fire was dead in the grate, and the air of the rooms was cold and thick with fog. He took two or three bundles of wood from the cupboard, and lit the fire anew, and bending above it, warmed his chilled hands at the smoky blaze. There were shadows lurking at his shoulder —hands raised to strike—hooded forms with hidden eyes afire—he knew how the eyes blazed behind him, though they were shrouded and unseen—came nearer, noiseless, step by step. And though he sat in stern disdain of these unreal horrors, and knew them for what they were, they were still fearful to endure. He scorned to turn and scatter them; and he knew that if scattered, they would come again. "A vacant mind," he said aloud, "can breed these things by the thousand." His voice sounded hollow in the silence, and he half expected to be answered. "I must give myself an hour's hard work," he said again aloud, "or I shall not sleep to-night." So saying, he crossed the room, unlocked the safe, and drawing forth his ledgers, fixed his lamp, and began to study the long rows of figures. To-night he seemed endowed with a duplicate mental existence, for though he mastered the figures, and grasped all their conclusions firmly, he was still acutely conscious of the slowly creeping shadows and the threatening hands, and was at once afraid, and despiteful of himself for being so.

He rose at last, and standing with his back to the fire, which now burned brightly, he moved his hands before his breast, casting the palms outward, as if waving off his fears. "I have planned too long and too well," he murmured, "to surrender the prize to any shadows. 'Shadows to-night.'" he went on, smiling grimly, "'have struck

more terror to the soul of Richard, than can the substance of ten thousand—'" The grim smile faded. Whatever the ten thousand were who filled the place of Richmond, they were disagreeable companions. Garling had never been a handsome man, and when he smiled, he was further removed from beauty than even when he frowned. "Shadows—every one of you!" he said, with the renunciatory wave of the hands renewed. "Absolute trust. Not a doubt in any mind, after ten years. And the plan perfection."

As he spoke thus, there was even a sort of triumph in his face; and taking the lamp in his hand, he crossed the room firmly, entered his bed-chamber, and undressed. He who defies himself, is bold; and Garling slept with no perturbation of conscience. He slept, and the hours went by him; and every second the warp and woof of Circumstance shot in and out, and he had no knowledge of the web they wove.

CHAPTER XI.

ARMED AND LIKE A GIANT.

"LIFE," said Val Strange, repeating the dictum of the dyspeptic philosopher, "would be tolerable if it were not for its pleasures." Fully equipped for the slaughter of pike, and intent especially upon the beguiling of one wary monster, Val stood upon the river-brink, and employed all the arts he knew, and employed them all in vain. In the summer-time, a lover of rural scenery in search of placid beauty might have gone further than the spot and fared much worse; but under the gray, cold mist which lay upon it now, it looked not altogether inviting. Reginald Jolly, stamping his half-frozen feet upon a shelf of rock near at hand, and carrying himself as one who is without interest in anything the world can offer, gave a grunt in answer which might have been either affirmative or negative. The speech which followed the grunt set the matter at rest.

"If you class this with life's pleasures," said the diminutive man, sadly, "I am with you. Let us go home, like reasonable people."

"I should like to catch that fellow," said Val wistfully.

"*He* knows that," said the little man, "and in his fishy mind derides you. He is aged, and the years have made him wise."

"I'll take another cut at him," Val returned. "Where are you going? Stop and help to carry him. He weighs half a hundredweight at least."

"You'll be able to carry all you catch of him," returned Reginald. "He scorned the devices of the angler when you were in the cradle. I am going to the mill, to sit by the manager's fire, and thaw my bones! When you are tired of luring the ancient Esox of the stream, you'll find me there."

"I'll come along at once," said Val reluctantly, "since you are bent on going." He got his tackle together whilst the little man executed a grotesque dance with his hands in his pockets; and all things being ready, they marched side by side down stream. After traveling some half mile through the damp and rimy grasses, they came in sight of a raw-looking mass of building on the other side of the river.

"What an ugly thing it is," said Reginald, nodding at it, "that paper-mill."

"Yes," said Val; "most things seem to be ugly, if you make money out of them. I mean—that things out of which one makes money are generally ugly. This was my uncle's doing. It spoils the landscape, but it's a valuable property."

There were two or three barges lying in front of the building, and in one of them a boy was making pretense to do something, conscious of the eye of the proprietor. Val hailed him, and ordered him to bring over a punt. The boy obeyed; and the two friends crossed the stream, and landing, entered the manager's room, where a cheerful fire blazed on the hearth. The manager was absent; but Val on his own property was of course at home. He stirred the fire, and, drawing forward a chair, seated himself.

"Anything to eat and drink?" asked the little man. "I'm starving."

"Sherry and sandwiches," said Val, producing them as he spoke.

Reginald attacked the provender. "I say, Strange," he said, arresting a sandwich midway to his mouth, "you haven't seen my sister, have you?"

"No," said Val, stirring the fire again, and sitting with the poker in his hand. "Yes, I have. I met her out riding once about a fortnight ago, I think. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know," returned the little man, with his mouth full. "I was thinking of her just then. I haven't told you the news yet, I fancy. She's going to be married."

"Ah!" said Val, carelessly. "And who's the happy man?"

"Who you think?"

"How should I know?"

"Lumby."

"Lumby?" said Val. "They haven't known each other long, have they?"

"Three or four months perhaps," said Reginald. "It's rather sudden; but you never saw a man so gone in all your life." He laughed, irreverent of the tender passion. "I like Lumby though," he added. "He's a good fellow, and I suppose he's a good match. If he weren't," pursued the candid youth, "the governor wouldn't have stood it. She's has lots of chances; but they were all a poverty-stricken lot who came. It's hard lines to be poor when you go into the matrimonial market. You're not a marrying sort of man, are you, Strange?"

"No," said Val, toying with the poker still; "I think not. I don't know. I shall marry some day, I suppose."

"It's a sort of thing," said Reginald, with much philosophy, "that runs in families."

"Lumby is a good fellow," said Val, balancing the poker. "I like Lumby."

"I suppose he's rich?" inquired Reginald.

"Will be," answered Val shortly. "Let's go home."

"Wait a bit," returned the other; "I want to get warm. What's the matter with you? You look as sulky as the pike which still lies among his reeds."

"I should have liked to catch that fellow," said Val, brightening up a little.

"There are two sides to everything," said the young philosopher. "He's happier as he is."

Val threw the poker into the fire-place with a clang. "Come along!" said he rising. "Let us go home. This place makes me dull, I think."

Reginald, with some protests, arose; and the two left the

mill and struck out a-foot across the fields. Val was a little preoccupied, and conversation languished. They came, after a walk of two miles, to Strange's house; and having washed and made some alterations in dress, they went to luncheon.

"It's a rather odd thing," said Reginald, "that you and I should have been chums so long, and that you should never have met my people."

"I don't know," said Strange, who was unusually depressed. "I shall see them to-morrow."

"We shall have quite a houseful," pursued the other. "Old Langton's there, and the three girls. Nice girls. I'm in love more or less with all three of 'em; but I can't afford it. Now, you might marry one of 'em, if you like —you, 'with lands in Kent and messuages in York,' can marry whom you will."

"Oh," said Val, abstractedly, "*I* sha'n't marry."

"You never," said Reginald, "did what you said you would do; and you generally do what you say you won't do. I'll bet all I'm worth you marry within five years." Strange made no response to this challenge. "Within three years," pursued the challenger. "Within two. Come, now!"

"I don't know," said Val, rousing suddenly, "that I ought to go to-morrow to your place, Jolly."

"Why?" asked his companion.

"Henderson has been at me for a week past," said Val; "I've seen no accounts for a quarter of a year. They'll take a day or two, and—"

"Pooh!" said Reginald, taking advantage of the pause. "I've asked you three times. If you don't like to come, say so."

"Don't like to come?" cried Val, positively flushing in his warmth. "I'll forgive you that, old man. Never mind. Let business slide for a while. I'll be with you." After this little burst, he fell again into moodiness; and his companion, finding him intractably dull, retired to the billiard-room, and there solaced himself with a book and a cigar. Dinner-time came, and Val was in wild spirits, talking with random brilliance; but in the evening he faded back to his afternoon condition.

"What *is* the matter with you?" cried his companion at

last, throwing away a book, and taking his stand on the hearth-rug.

"I'm hipped," said Strange. "If you had come out of that lovely Neapolitan climate into this beastly English winter, you'd feel the same. To think that I might have stayed there, and that I didn't! To think I might go back now, and that I don't! What fools we are, to be sure!"

"Apropos," said the philosopher with a grin, "how it soothes a man to speak in the plural number. It's easy to say 'What fools *we* are;' hard to acknowledge, 'What a fool *I* am.' Isn't it, Val?"

"Well," returned Val, "what a fool *I* am."

"Are you?" said Reginald, with provoking coolness. It was not to be wondered at that Val at once departed for his bedroom with a mere "good-night." His friend looked after him with sly humor in every wrinkle of his comic face. "I think I can lay my finger on the affected spot," he mused. "Here's another man in love. Things are a bit rough with him. Perhaps she's too great a swell—perhaps somebody else is in the way—perhaps she has pronounced the fatal 'No.' Any way, he's in love, and unprosperous. He will marry some time. He won't marry. The mere mention of an engagement to be married sets him off, and he spends a whole afternoon and evening in brooding about somebody else's luck and his own ill-fortune. I wonder if I ever shall be taken that way. Oh, my dear young man, if ever you are attacked with that complaint, turn hermit till it's over. For if Strange is laughable, and Lumby comic, think what you'd be, you bald-headed little beggar—think, and tremble."

Whatever cause disturbed Val Strange's peace of mind, it was certainly not clear to himself. Perhaps he was merely suffering from the *ennui* which inevitably results from an aimless life. It is beyond dispute that he was in an abominable temper, and this was all the more remarkable from the ordinary placidity and sweetness of his ways. He threw a boot at his valet, and drove that obsequious friendly attendant from the chamber in bodily fear; then laughed at his own anger, and sat down by the bedside to gnaw his mustache, and think gloomily about nothing in particular.

It was not in the nature of the attack itself, or in the nature of the man affected by it, that this unpleasant men-

tal condition should last long, and in the morning Val descended in his customary spirits. Yesterday's mists had cleared away from the fields as well as from his mind; the wintery air was keen and bracing; the drive, to youth and recovered jollity, a real pleasure. Reginald introduced his friend with all due ceremony.

"Mr. Strange," said Mr. Jolly, after the first few commonplaces of conversation had passed, "I am told that you have quite a wonderful collection of British birds."

"There's something of the sort at my place, I believe," said Val.

"I have no doubt that mine is but a poor exhibition after yours; but I should like you to see it."

"I took them over from the late proprietor," said Mr. Jolly, waving his hand, as they entered a long chamber which contained the collection. "I think I shall complete the collection, and hand it over to the British Museum or some kindred institution. This," indicating a moth-eaten owl, "is the renowned"—he fixed his double glasses, and failing at a casual glance to make out the Latin inscription, bent lower, murmuring—"the renowned—the renowned—in short, a species of bird with which you are no doubt familiar." The inscription was indecipherable, and Mr. Jolly was the least thing in the world embarrassed.

"I am like Hamlet," said Val; "I can tell a hawk from a hernshaw when the wind is nor'-west."

"Exactly," returned Mr. Jolly—"exactly." His manner was a little abstracted. "Oh, by the way," he cried, suddenly turning upon his guest with a smile of surprise, "I fancy, Mr. Strange, that you and Gerard Lumby are old friends. Reginald has told me so, if I remember aright."

"We were at Rugby and Oxford together," Val answered.

"A charming fellow Lumby," said Mr. Jolly—"a charming fellow. Frank, unaffected, English." He spoke with an approach of fervor.

"He's a good fellow," said Strange—"a very good fellow."

"You moderns," said the host, with great geniality, "are terrible fellows. I have been young myself; I heard the chimes at midnight. We thought we traveled at a good pace in those days, but you leave us far behind."

"How?" inquired Val.

"Every way," said the genial elder—"every way. You travel like tornadoes. You do everything off the reel, whether you storm a fort, make a tour round the world, or engage yourselves to be married. Nothing takes so long a time as it used to take."

"Except dinner," responded Val.

"Except dinner," laughed the host. "Exactly—exactly. In all other matters you go headlong. Your friend Gerard, for instance, has quite amazed us all." It was Mr. Jolly's constant misfortune that he could not find the *juste milieu*. He was always on this side of the line or the other, and in any mood transparently unreal.

"What does he want to find out about Gerard?" Val asked himself. Believing in the extreme subtlety of his own approach, Mr. Jolly advanced behind his mask of genial candor.

"He might write like Cæsar—'I came, I saw, I overcame.' It was very sudden; but when young people are so impetuously resolved, what can old people do but yield? And after all, an honest love-match is the best thing. I don't pretend to have any scorn for money. I could very well have endured to see my daughter married to a wealthy man."

"Ah!" thought Val to himself, "he wants to know the true extent of Lumby's fortune. What an ingenuous, artless old file he is!" A smile, quickly suppressed, played on Val's features, and he added aloud: "People think too much of money in affairs of that sort, nowadays, Mr. Jolly. And Lumby has a nice little competence, after all."

Mr. Jolly turned upon him a countenance of swift amazement, and his jaw fell. "Yes," he said tremulously—whilst, in the words of the great soothsayer, an "ice-taloned pang shot through brain and pericardium"—"a nice little competence." Would it be necessary to break off the match? A nice little competence merely, was not what he wanted. Was it possible that rumor had deceived him? The Lumbys kept no style after all, and a mere two thousand a year might keep them going as they were. What if the wealth were all a bubble? It could not be true.

Val, with an inward laugh, came to his relief. "A very nice little competence indeed." He could not resist the temptation to a little solemn chaff at this unskillful fisherman's expense. "Forgive me, Mr. Jolly, if I exercise so

much freedom as to compliment you upon your generosity and unworldliness. But even in these extravagant days, a young couple may do very well on five-and-twenty thousand a year."

The unskillful fisherman breathed again; but even now the smile he forced was all awry. "You are surely jesting, Mr. Strange. Five-and-twenty thousand a year is a large fortune. The Lumbys live as modestly as I do, and I am not a wealthy man."

"Fact, I assure you," said Val, lightly. "That's the tune to which old Lumby's annual income may be said to dance into him. I don't suppose he spends much more than a tenth part of it. He is saving everything for Gerard."

"You amaze me!" said the disinterested parent. "I thought," he added with a touch of emotion, which seemed to him quite proper in the circumstances, "of nothing but my daughter's happiness."

"Of course," said Val, smiling to think of the fright he had given him.

"And after all," said Mr. Jolly, with easy stoicism, "wealth and happiness are separate things. Five-and-twenty thousand pounds a year! You amaze me, Mr. Strange—you amaze me."

Mr. Jolly had forgotten the collection of British birds by this time; but Val, mischievously feigning an interest in it, went carefully round among the feathered creatures, and examined them with great minuteness, until the joke began to pall, when he released his host, long since weary but unable gracefully to escape. The room in which the collection was arranged opened upon the garden, and Mr. Jolly led the way thither. Strange had not yet encountered Constance a second time; but he saw her now standing at a window which opened flush upon the lawn. Almost for the first time in his life he felt awkward, and his legs and his arms seemed a little in his way. He felt her eyes upon him, and had a ridiculous contest within himself as to whether or not he ought to bow to her, as though he were a school-boy, or an aspiring shopman whose study of the "Book of Etiquette"—priced at sixpence, and written by a Member of the Aristocracy—had as yet been incomplete. And this was Val Strange, whose eligible bachelorhood had introduced him to rank and beauty half over England, and

who was rumored quite a killing personage among the fair. It was surely somewhat surprising. Constance threw open the window and made way for them to enter.

"My dear," said her father, "this is Mr. Strange, an old friend of Gerard's. This is my daughter, Mr. Strange."

Mr. Strange bowed and plunged into small-talk, whereof he was accounted a master. Constance answered with a pleased and pleasing vivacity, and Val's unaccountable awkwardness vanished. The great slow Gerard had none of the polite arts and no capacity for small-talk in the world. When he had a chance of spending an hour with Constance, he sat and adored; and being adored, young ladies, is dull work in the long run, let me tell you, unless you adore in return. Then—ah, then! who shall say how much of heaven's own color is flashed across the sober gray of common hours! The proverb says that Love begets Love. But that is only true when Love can surround its object with sweet observances, not when it can do nothing but sit and worship with devout eyes and hungry heart in the presence of other people. And since that day when Gerard had pleaded his own cause with such success, he had never seen Constance alone; and even if he had, might scarcely have dared to plead it anew in like manner. And so the influence he had gained, faded, and was lost; and a noticeable thing came out of it, for no influence that ever the world saw set a-rolling yet, stood still before it had set something else in motion. Gerard had broken beyond the magic circle of maidenly reserve, and it was no longer *absolutely* sacred. And beside that was this fact—that Constance, being disposed of in the matrimonial market, and her disposal being known to the world she moved in, was not liable to misconstruction if she surrendered herself to pleasant human speech with nice people of the sterner sex. She was not leading on Val Strange to a declaration—she had no need to try to lead anybody to a declaration any more. She could be herself and could lay down her guarding weapons of coldness and hauteur and the rest, and no man could come to heart-wreck any more because of her. Observe also, that if all men were to be henceforth accounted safe from her, she also thought herself safe from any assault which Love might make. For was she not engaged to be married to Gerard? And what made the thing safer yet than safety need be, was that Val Strange

was Gerard's friend. And again—to heap up reasons—what reasonable young woman thinks that every pleasant man with whom she talks is going to fall in love with her?

On Val's side, love was far enough away to begin with—or at least seemed so. He acknowledged Constance's beauty. as any but a blind man would have been obliged to do. He felt something of the fascination of her manner, but as yet not in an alarming degree. He thought Gerard a man to be congratulated, but not as yet a man to be envied.

Gerard was so near a neighbor, that he came over only as a privileged guest, and stayed his hour or two, and went away again; or made one in a shooting-party, dined afterward at Mr. Jolly's table, and rode home to sleep. Val on the other hand was in the house, and saw much more of Constance than did her accepted lover. She too saw more of him than of Gerard. There was no fancy of unfaithfulness to her mind. Her lover bored her, that was all, and the other man amused and interested her. And so the tragedy began.

One day, Constance and Milly—who by this time were fast friends, and bound in the bonds of an enduring sisterhood, after the manner of young ladies who have known each other intimately for a week or two—rode to the meet to see the hounds throw off. Mr. Jolly, who had never jumped a hedge in his life, used to announce, with a pensive sigh of regret, that his hunting days were over, and he and Val were escort to the ladies. Gerard was at the meet, but for some reason unknown forbore to follow the hounds. Strange had taken his place at the side of Constance, Mr. Jolly was pompously playing at politeness with Milly, when Gerard rode after them and joined Constance, assuming the position to which his right entitled him. Val fell behind, and on a sudden black Jealousy rose up in his heart, armed, and like a giant. And with that the scales fell from his eyes, and he saw, and trembled at the precipice upon whose edge he stood, the abyss into which that same black giant threatened to toss him. For when Society has done its absolute best with a man, when it has given him a knowledge of the classics, and taught him a foreign language or two, and dowered him with social gifts, and has in short polished him, until he scarce knows himself in his new-found brilliance, it has left him at bottom where he

was before, and the passions are with him still, eternal and ineradicable. Fear, and Remorse, and Hate, and Rage, and Jealousy, and Love, with all the rest, live on in spite of civilization, and make life noble, as the soul guides them, or make life ignoble, as they guide the soul. All human history is built on them, all human life environed with them. They fire the deathless lines of Æschylus, and sprinkle with dews of Hermon and of Tophet great Shakespeare's page: and with them the masters of fiction still awe and melt us; and the merest yokel who reads the daily papers may see them alive among us to this day.

And with two of that Titanic band it was Val Strange's lot to fight, until he won or fell; for in a battle with the passions there is no drawn fight possible. Love and Jealousy came out of their hiding-places, and called Honor to the conflict. Lumby was Val's friend; but with Val, friendship was not as it is with some rare man here and there, a passion. Yet he was fond of Gerard, and would have done much for him. He watched the accepted lover from this time in all his interviews with Constance. He could not doubt the worship in Gerard's eyes; but he saw no responsive glance in the maid's when she looked at her declared wooer. He saw that Constance brightened when she talked with *him*, that her whole manner was changed and *triste* when Gerard sat by her.

"It is a mere sale for money," he cried within himself, raging. "She does not care for him. If I were free to plead, she might listen. She might learn to love me. She will never care for him."

Gerard was blind to Constance's weariness in his own presence, and had no jealousy for Val's advances. He was like Othello—once to be in doubt was once to be resolved—and he was himself so loyal-hearted, that by nature he and Suspicion dwelt in opposite camps, and held no communion. And so the tragedy went forward.

CHAPTER XII.

"MARY," SAID HIRAM, MEDITATIVELY, I'VE MADE A DISCOVERY."

In the days when Athens was a fairy city, when Duke Theseus, who governed it, was in love with Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, and Hermia, loving Lysander, was be-

loved by Demetrius, even Signor Bottom had his tender passages. And whilst gentlemen owning broad acres and living in country mansions in these later days were perturbed by Love's doings, even an omnibus cad might feel his smart. The whole round globe is impartially governed. However humiliating it may seem to the devoutly constitutional mind, royal toes have been plagued with corns and crowned heads with tooth-ache; and at the very hour when Royalty has gone limping, or with swollen cheek awry, the merry goatherd and his tattered lass have played for kisses, like Cupid and Campaspé in the ballad. Love, monarch of hearts, all hail! Thou levelest men, not as Envy would, by pulling down the lofty, but by lifting all to equal heights, making a goatherd as happy as a king, and an omnibus cad as blest as a country gentleman.

Hiram, on rare holidays, was a sight worth seeing. All the sartorial art of the East could do was done for him. In the summer-time, a white hat; a white waistcoast; a grass-green scarf, whereon a poet so minded might have written a ballad; a nosegay at the button-hole; white gaiters, in spotless contrast with the polish of his shoes—these were his signs of holiday. In winter he affected a more somber glory, and his dark overcoat bore a collar of sham Astrakhan. His scarf was of some subdued crimson, inclining toward maroon; his gloves were edged with fur at the wrists; and the natty walking-cane of summer days was exchanged for an umbrella. A chain of some metal, which he who had faith enough might take for gold, crossed the white waistcoat, or lay outside the furred overcoat, according to the season. On these days of splendor, few and far between, Hiram would arise early in the morning, and would be heard cheerfully whistling whilst he went deftly about certain household work, taken upon himself within a week of his settlement in his new lodgings. Poor Mrs. Martial might well have fancied at first that some Norwegian troll had by good hap strayed into Whitechapel, and assumed the guardianship of her kitchen. Every morning Hiram made it as neat as a new pin, lit the fire, polished the copper kettle, black-leaded the hobs and the grate, varnished his own boots, washed and dressed, made tea, took his own early breakfast, and was gone before the household was astir. It was only on holidays that Hiram had let loose that mellow whistle: and so, since holidays

were so few, the little household had only heard it twice or thrice. But one heart had begun to beat at it. When Hiram came home at midnight one little head would stir upon the pillow, and in the dark, two pallid cheeks grew rosy for an instant as the stealthy footstep of the late comer passed up the stair. Was ever lodger so helpful and so unexacting? Did ever omnibus conductor pay his rent so punctually, since omnibuses first began to run in London highways?

Why should the little milliner's heart so beat at the cheerful tones of Hiram's mellow whistle? Why? Oh, undiscerning querist, not to guess that, by some occult arrangement, her holiday was made to chime with his. And what a difference the letting of the lodgings made! The eminent "Atlas" once repeated to me a ballad—I know not whose; his own, perhaps, for he wrote verse once upon a time, and wrote it gracefully—and the burden of the ballad was, "What is a pound?" What *is* a pound when you can afford to spend it on a dinner? What is a penny when it stands between you and hunger? A pound? You may spend an evening at the opera by means of it. You may live on it in London for a fortnight. It may make all the difference between slow starvation for a month, and plenty for the same period. And this last was just the difference it made each month for Mrs. Martial and her daughter. Hiram never admitted by word or glance that he knew this; but he knew it well. The poor spare room had never been let until he took it, and he came to the house like a lean American angel, making the physical conditions of life just bearable to its inmates, and giving them both heart enough to bear more troubles than his coming left to them.

"Now, Missis Martial, ma'hm," said Hiram, one cheerful morning, when the air was crisp even in London, and the sunlight golden, "where air we goin'?" He was particularly gorgeous that morning, with a bit of crimson silk handkerchief peeping from his breast-pocket, and a pair of buff-colored dogskin gloves dangling in his left hand. Mrs. Martial looked at Mary. Mary looked down and blushed a little, without knowing why; and Hiram, with a polite flourish, bowed to her, and observed to her mother: "We must go, ma'hm, where these attractions may be seen." At that Mary's blush deepened, and the care-worn

mother smiled timidly. "I should like to see your Tower of London, ma'hm," said Hiram, "if I might suggest, an' if you air not tired of it."

"I have never seen the Tower," said Mrs. Martial.

"Nor I," said Mary.

"Ladies," said Hiram, "you surprise me." They felt almost guilty beneath his glance of wonder, and explained that Londoners know little of the sights of London, leaving them for the most part for the exploration of country visitors. "Your Tower of London," said Hiram, "is perhaps as inter-estin' as any monument in the Old World. It is chockful of objects which air hallowed by the touch of history. It is interwove with the most remarkable associations of your mo-narchical institutions." He spoke with so much severity, that they decided to wipe out their reproach at once, and set forth; Hiram giving an arm to each, and piloting them along the quieter streets with mingled grace and grandeur. Coming upon busy thoroughfares, this comfortable order was perforce abandoned, though Hiram still kept Mary's arm within his, probably with a view to instruct her, with the more convenience, in the history of the Tower. Reaching that stately edifice in course of time, they were parceled off with other visitors, and then huddled through it, after the senseless manner of the place, by a venerable beef-eater, with whom much familiarity with its contents had bred contempt, and who was as interested and as interesting as a parrot might have been. It was not his fault, poor old fellow. He had fought for his country, and the leave to go through this dull routine was his reward; and the Tower was a quiet haven to him, after a life in camp and barrack and the tented field of war. Hiram was severely historical during the hurried gabbling run the veteran gave his party; but I fancy that for one moment the present drew him from the past. Visitors to the Tower know one darksome dungeon —a mere black-hole in the wall, where one of the noblest of English spirits sighed itself slowly toward heaven in pious resignation, through weary years of undeserved imprisonment. It was here—if our surmise be true—that Hiram's interest in history momentarily ceased. He and Mary entered this darksome dungeon together, and were alone there for the space of perhaps thirty seconds. And when they emerged, Mary's hair and bonnet were, by the

merest tifle, disarranged, and she was blushing; whilst Mr. Search's hat was the least thing on one side, and a lurking smile of satisfaction was in his eyes, though his features bore the impress of an imperturbable gravity. Perhaps a careful observer might have noticed after this a certain air of proprietorship on Hiram's part, a way of disposing of Mary's arm, for instance, as though, having kissed her in that dungeon—if he really did kiss her—he had sealed her for his own. Mr. Search talked a great deal; but he said wonderfully little about himself or his own sentiments; and yet he and the little maiden seemed to understand each other perfectly. Once started, they seemed to be indefatigable as sightseers; and after a rest, they set out for the British Museum. Arrived there, what made Mrs. Martial pause outside the Egyptian court, whilst the young people went in together? Perhaps her excuse of fatigue was true, though Hiram brought them all the way in a four-wheeled cab, as though he had been a millionaire. Any way, Hiram and Mary went in, and found themselves alone in that solitude of eld; and there, undismayed by the presence of the grave Egyptian faces, Hiram repeated the experiment first attempted in the Tower dungeon. They sat upon the base of a pedestal on which stands the vast presentment of a head, deity or hero. Beneath the plaited stone beard, a yard square—Cheops might have known the face—the little London milliner and her Yankee lover sat and talked together. May be Egyptian lad and lass made love on such a pedestal, and found it a pretty pastime, before blind Homer begged and sung through Greece.

"Mary," said Hiram, meditatively, "I've made a discovery. 'Bus-conductin' is not the way to fortune. 'Taint even one of the ways, an' I shall have to shelve it. Same time, it's reg'lar work, an' brings in reg'lar money, an' I don't want to be throwed loose again. When I was in Boston, I used sometimes to get a piece o' work in a printin'-office p'r'aps two days a week. While I was at it, I used to earn as much as I do now in a week; but workin' by flashes, an' idling three parts of the time, it was like tryin' to warm your house with gunpowder. An' I don't want to do that. I want to keep the fire burnin' steady, and burnin' always; not to have, now a flare, an' now nothin' but the smoke. So I can't throw over what I've got till somethin' else turns up."

To this sensible view of things, Mary gave complete adhesion; and they sat and discussed the future. Or rather Hiram discussed the future, and Mary listened, believing him. Mrs. Martial, sitting outside, had her own thoughts. She knew the situation and accepted it with some natural reluctance. Mr. Search was kind; Mr. Search was honest and gentle and manly; but if things had gone otherwise than they had, she might have looked higher for her daughter. Meantime, Hiram had not even seemed to think of marriage, except as connected with fortune; and he was so confident of getting on in the world, that he inspired both the women-folk with his own certainties. When he and Mary had settled what was to be by their own desires, like people who make much more noise in the world, they strayed back from the stony remnants of old Egypt, and Hiram took the ladies to dinner. In the evening, they went to the play, and Hiram chose for them Mr. Dillon's once celebrated performance of "Belphegor," which he had seen advertised in America. And when they had all three laughed and sorrowed with the mountebank, they went home in an omnibus, and the holiday was over.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THAT COIN IS MARKED," SAID HIRAM, SERIOUSLY; "I SHA'N'T TAKE ANOTHER."

HIRAM went back to work, and plotted all day how to force Fortune to his own pattern, and thought of many ways, though none of them seemed to answer. In his studies of the daily papers, he came again and again upon the phrase, "Plans and particulars sent free on application;" and as an example of the direction his thoughts continually took, I give the scheme which this suggested to him. "S'posin', now," said Hiram to himself, hanging behind his 'bus, and turning this fancy over, "I was to take a bureau, and make a list of every one of these coons, and send a letter to each of 'em. 'SEARCH & Co's *Advertising Office.* MISTER. Be so good as send to us in future all plans and particulars of sales by your noted firm. Yourn truly, HIRAM K. SEARCH & Co.' Reckon theer's a thousand on 'em. That takes five pound to post 'em all.

One expense an' done with. Reckon, again, theer's an average of one sale a day, an' each packet weighs four ounces, what with postin' bills, auctioneers' catalogues, an' wrappers. That's two hundred an' fifty pound-weight; fifteen hundred pound-weight a week. Sell it for waste to the paper-mills at a farthin' a pound—that's a trifle over thirty shillin' a week, English money." Having completed this calculation, Hiram smiled. "Thirty shillin' a week. That's so. An' when you've cleared your expenses, if you do, you air pro-vided for by a government which is proud to recognize financial talent. Pro-vided for, say at Portland or some other ekally attractive quarters, for at least five years. No, my inventive young friend, we will not perform in that partic'lar show."

But there was no possible financial enterprise in the direction of which Hiram did not at one time or another cast his thoughts.

A week after the holiday, he went home to his lodgings at the usual hour, and was surprised to find a light in two of the front windows. Entering with a presentment of evil on his mind, he encountered Mary, standing at the door with a candle in her hand. "Mr. Search," she whispered.

"Hiram," he said correcting her lightly, though he could see that some trouble weighed upon her. "What's the matter?"

"I sat up to see you," she said hesitatingly, "to ask you—"

"Yes, my dear," said Hiram, taking the candle in his hand—"to ask me—"

"Oh, Mr. Search," she whispered, in such evident distress that it pained him to see it, "I scarcely know how to ask you. You have been so good, and we have tried your kindness so often—"

"Mary," said Hiram putting his arm around her waist, "don't you lose my respect for you. I won't have you talkin' nonsense. You air naturally the wisest as well as the prettiest little gell in London, an' I don't want you to fall into any ridic'lousnesses. Now, my dear."

"Hiram," she began again—and he, with a nod of bright approval and a little pressure of the arm which encircled her waist bent down to listen—"mother is ill, seriously ill."

"Dear, now!" said Hiram, gently, drawing her nearer to him.

"We are so miserably poor just now!" said the girl, speaking softly still, but with difficulty through her fast-rising tears. "The doctor ordered quinine, wine, and beef-tea."

"Did he, now?" asked Hiram, patting the wet cheek.

"And I had to pawn a jacket and some other things to get them; and now they are gone; and I have no more money, and nothing left to take—"

"My darlin'," said Hiram, pitifully.

"And will you," she whispered, sobbing still, "let us have the week's rent in advance, this once? I am so ashamed to ask you"—she would have drawn away from him; but his arm restrained her—"you have been so good and generous ever since you came."

"Now, now, now," said Hiram, patting the wet cheek again, "I wish I was a millionaire; but I ain't. You wait a minute, an' I'll be down again." He left her, and mounted the stairs with long silent strides, and returned in a few minutes with a lean chamois-leather purse. "It's only nine shillin'," said he mournfully; "but I shall have more by and by." He placed his hand above her lips, when she would have thanked him. "You just leave a note for me, if you should want me in the mornin'. How long has she been ailin'?"

"Ever since the day we went out together," the girl answered.

"Mebbe a bit tired," said Hiram, soothingly. "Don't you fret, my pretty. And if you want anythin', ask me f ır it, an' if I can get it, you shall have it; an' if you don't, I'll never forgive you, not if you was to love me all your life-time as well as I love you. An' that," added Hiram to himself, "you never will, because why on airth should you?" He left her there with a kiss, and mounted again to his own room, where, by the light of a single dim candle, he sat solemnly down at a small green-painted deal table, and surveyed himself in an oblong mirror some eight inches by six. It was not vanity which taught him to thus gaze upon him elf. "'Taint your face an' figger, Hiram, my lad, that makes the little gell cling to you, you fortooitous concourse of disadvantageous anatomical circumstances!

Wall, that's a pretty phrase, I vow, an' it has the merit o' being fairly descriptive. Yes, sir. It pokes you up in the identical cave you live in. You air a fortooitous concourse of disadvantageous anatomical circumstances. That, sir, is your personal ticket. An' yet, Hiram," he continued laying down the mirror, aud rubbing his lean cheek thoughtfully with the tips of his fingers, "it ain't the prettiest men as the best gells care for. No, sir. Grit tells. An', Hiram, you're takin' noo responsabilities, an' grit is wanted. Now I tell you, sir, an' I tell you straight, that if theer is in your ugly figger one soft place, it's got to be macadam'd; fur I am not goin' to let that poor little creetur' mire her feet by walkin' over any swampy spots in you. That may be figgerative; but my meanin's clear. You air not a sentimental party, Hiram, an' so fur as I know you, you never wrote a set o' verses in your life; but you know as well as I do, theer's nothin' in the world, no blessin' in it, like a good woman's love. An' how you got it, I dun*no*, but got it you have. Take care of it; be worthy of it, Hiram, an' your personal appearance will not count. An honest man, if he's as ornery-lookin' as Zebedee Pitman, can give Apoller p'ints, an' then knock chunks off him." And with this moral reflection, Hiram began slowly and gravely to disrobe, and in a few minutes was sound asleep.

There was no note for Hiram in the morning; but he wrote and left upon the kitchen table a small missive, asking that news of the patient's progress should be left for him that night. Just three words answered this, "Mother is better," written in a thin hand, upon a scrap of letter paper; but in the very dead and hollow of the following night, Hiram, always a light sleeper, was awakened by a creaking sound; and sitting upright in the dark, listened. Light footsteps went hastily to and fro, and were lost on the carpeting of the lower room. Then Hiram heard a voice groaning; and having struck a light, he hurried on his clothes, and went to see what was the matter. Mary, with a scared face, was coming up the stairs when she caught sight of him.

"Is she worse" he asked. "You want a doctor. Tell me where he lives?" Armed with the doctor's address, he was away at full speed, rang up the medical man, and brought him home. The doctor kept a small dispensary in a poor and crowded neighborhood. Poverty and sick-

ness were so common in his locality that he had grown somewhat hard.

"My fee," he said, as they walked together, "is five shillings."

"Very well," said Hiram sadly.

"I can't afford," said the poor medico, "to come for less at such a time of night."

"Very well," said Hiram again; and they walked on in silence through the sleeping streets. Reaching the house, Hiram opened the door with his latch-key, and sat down in the darkness of the lower room to wait. In a few minutes he heard the medical man descending, and went into the narrow hall, faintly illumined by the street-lamp, to meet him. "How is she?"

"Come with me," was the answer, "and I will give you a mixture." Again they passed into the streets together. "Relatives of yours?" asked the doctor as they walked, nodding his head backward toward the house.

"No," said Hiram; "I'm only a lodger there. How is she?"

"It's a gone case I should say," returned the doctor. "There's just a chance for her, and that's all."

Hiram made no answer; and they reached the dispensary in silence; and there, from his meager store of drugs, the doctor made up the best prescription his means allowed. "Five shillings," he said as he handed the bottle to Hiram.

"Keep that till I bring the money to you," said the 'bus conductor, detaching his imitation gold chain from his waistcoat, and drawing forth the showy cheap aluminum or oroide watch. "I haven't got it with me." The doctor took it reluctantly and with some grumbling; and Hiram sped away with the medicine. A police officer looked suspiciously at him as he raced along; but, reflecting probably on his own inability to compete with Hiram's lengthy legs, forbore to pursue him. Running all the way, Hiram burst breathless into the street he lived in; and there, lest his hurried footsteps should disturb the patient, subdued his haste and walked on tiptoe. Having given up the medicine, he whispered: "I shall be in the kitchen if you want me;" and before the girl had time to remonstrate, he was gone. He sat alone in the darkness, thinking, until the house had dropped once more into midnight stillness, and at last fell uncomfortably to sleep,

awaking every now and again with great nods, which seemed almost to shake him from his chair. At the usual hour, he lit the fire, guessing the time by the look of the outside air, performed all the small household duties he had taken upon himself, and went out. The morning was raw and foggy, and as the day went on, the fog deepened. His anxieties grew so, that at midday, finding a temporary substitute, and promising him payment for his services, he pleaded illness, and went home again, and heard worse news than ever of the patient. Going to his own room, he opened a little drawer, and taking out a small bag, made search within it until he found, in a corner, amongst odds and ends of thread and a score of buttons of various patterns, the half-sovereign which Gerard Lumby had given him, carefully treasured until now.

"I don't like parting with it," he murmured, as he turned it over. "If I'd ha' spent it in a racket of any sort, I should ha' felt like flyin' in the face o' Providence. But it's a good cause—an' yet I don't like partin' with it." Suddenly his face brightened; and putting the coin carefully in his pocket, he left the house, and walked the streets, with curious glances at the shop-windows and the signs, blurred with the fog. Coming at last to a pawnbroker's, he entered, pushed aside a swinging-door, and found himself in a wooden box with a counter before him.

"What do *you* want?" asked the boy behind the counter.

"What will you give me on that?" asked Hiram, producing the half-sovereign and laying it on the counter.

"Why, wodder yer talkid about?" asked the boy, who was probably of Hebraic extraction. "That's half a thick-ud. Get out!" He said this playfully, as if in response to a humorous overture.

But Hiram's face was grave. "That's a half-a-sovereign," he said solemnly; "worth ten shillin', ain't it? What will you lend on it? I wouldn't part with that coin for five pound. It's all the money I've got, an' I want to realize on it; an' when I can get it back, I shall come for it."

"Are yer id eardest?" asked the boy. Hiram nodded with funeral solemnity. "All right," said the boy, with his beady Jewish eyes a-glitter. "Nine shillings." Hiram nodded again. "What's yer name?"

"Hiram Kysarchichus Search," responded the client gravely.

"What?" said the boy. Hiram repeated it. "Here," said the boy, pushing the pawn-ticket and the pen across the counter. "Write it dowd yerself."

Hiram wrote it in a clerkly hand; and the boy, having demanded and received a halfpenny for the ticket, handed over nine shillings, and the transaction was complete.

"That coin is marked," said Hiram seriously. "I sha'n't take another."

The boy turned it over, and looking sideways at Hiram from the corners of his eyes, passed his thumb and finger across each side of it. His trained and cunning touch detected the mark, and fixing a watchmaker's glass to his eye, he read, "G.L. to H.K.S."

"All right," said he, folding it into a little parcel, and tossing it into a drawer, after pinning it to its ticket duplicate.

Hiram then left the shop, and again made his way to the dispensary, where, the doctor being at that time abroad, he left word for him to follow on his return. It was already late in the evening when the doctor again reached the house. He spent but a brief time in the sick-room, and then descending, took Hiram by the sleeve and drew him into the street where the fog drove in visible billows across the bleared flicker of the lamps.

"It will be all over in a few hours," he said. "She asked me, and I told her so. There is somebody she wants to see, and I have sent her daughter to her. Have you got the five shillings? Thank you. Here's the watch. I sha'n't charge for this visit, because I've not been able to do anything. I shall come round to make out the certificate in the morning." It was an every-day matter with him, and practice had taught him an outer hardness.

Hiram went back to the little front-room, and sat there until Mary came down. "My dear," he said, "you must get a nurse." He dreaded what he knew was coming, and could not bear to think of the helpless girl alone at such a time.

"Our next-door neighbor is a nurse," said the girl. "I can ask her to come in. But I want to go to Fleet Street. My—my father lives there, and mother says she must see him."

"You call in the nurse, while I go to Fleet Street," said Hiram. "Give me the number."

She gave him full instructions; and he set out, and remembering the doctor's words, "It will be all over in a few hours," he leaped into a cab, forgetful of his scanty store of money, and drove hastily. Then came the interviews already chronicled, and then the silent watches of the night; and for Hiram in his loneliness, and Mary in her terror-stricken watch, as for Garling in his sleep, with every passing second the warp and woof of Circumstance shot in and out, and not one of the three had any knowledge of the web which Time's swift shuttle was weaving.

CHAPTER XIV.

"YOU LOOK WRETCHED, VAL, WHAT IS IT?"

It befell that although Gerard Lumby made little progress enough with Constance in those little parlor encounters, in which, perhaps, the most earnest of lovers is the least likely to thrive, he talked with a lover's enthusiasm outside her presence, and chose Val Strange, of all men in the world, to talk to. Val, dreading his own love all the while, listened to him with such heart-burnings as may be imagined, but gave no sign.

Mr. Jolly, in the meantime, kept his house *en fête* for a whole winter month, and was almost crowded from his own rooms by guests. Gerard having proclaimed Val great in private theatricals and charades, that young gentleman was installed as a sort of amateur manager of the Grange revels. This partly delighted and partly frightened him. No man schools himself to dishonor in a day. The shiftless, helpless, sponging spendthrift, the hopeless drunkard, the betrayer, the sharper—all have had their remorses, their struggles, their backward longings toward relinquished honor, or at least their piteous glances that way cast. And Val Strange was less than most men fitted to be a happy wrong-doer. By nature candid and kindly, and greatly careful of the good opinion of the world, he was sure to suffer horribly if he played any man false; and here was temptation growing almost too much for him. He was torn by love and jealousy, and drank alternate draughts of sweet and bitter poison. The poison was sweet when he stood

alone with his friend's plighted wife and talked with her, and drank the beauty of her face and voice, and the exquisite intoxication of her presence; or when his arm circled her in some slow waltz, and they moved, as on air together, to the dying falls of Strauss's melodies when the music sighed as if foredone with pleasure half grown into pain. Bitter the poison—how bitter, only Jealousy can know—when the unsuspecting Gerard came to claim his right, and talked with her—walked, rode, drove, danced with her, always with right on his side, and the surety of an admitted claim. And much as the rages which sometimes filled him taught him to fear himself, he feared Gerard too, by an instinct which warned him that the latter was the last man whom it might be wise to turn from a friend into an enemy. Yet perhaps I do Strange some injustice here, for he had physical courage enough, and it may be that his dread of Gerard was of a better sort. To face eyes once friendly, and now full of hatred and reproach—to give any man the right to say, "You have played the villain, false friend," might well inspire more dread than a man could summon at any mere physical call.

At last, in his miseries and perplexities, Val made one resolve, and as the outcome of it, he sat down and wrote this letter to his old yachting companion:

"My dear Gilbert,—I am in the dullest hole I ever got into in my life. I can not escape with any degree of grace under a fortnight, and I am in danger of being bored to death. Pray send me a telegram, purporting to come from any fictitious personage whom you may be pleased to invent for the occasion, advising me of important business, and insisting upon my return. Do this for old friendship's sake. 'I do adjure thee, by old pleasant days,' make the message sufficiently urgent to bear me away without apology. I am peppered, I warrant you; and if your telegram should come later than to-morrow, it will find me indeed a grave man. Yours,

"Val Strange."

The resolve to write this was not arrived at without much trouble, although it is one thing to determine and another to do. When he had sent it away, he thought of

all he was leaving, and half wished it recalled. He went sleepless nearly all night, and tossed to and fro upon his bed undecided. Now he was all for flight, and now flight seemed so cruel as to be impossible. There are some pangs it is not in human nature to endure voluntarily. When he presented himself at the breakfast-table, he looked ill, and Constance, who sat near him, spoke of it.

"It is nothing," he responded—"a headache."

People gave him their condolences, and it cost him a great effort to keep his temper. Breakfast over, he retired to his own room and brooded there, longing and dreading to be called away. By and by a young man on a dirty gray pony rode up the drive and delivered an envelope, buff-colored, and bearing, side by side with Mr. Strange's name and present address, the inscription, "Five shillings for porterage." The footman leisurely sought out Mr. Strange, who, tearing open the envelope, read: "From BROWNE, 13 Mount Street. Everything going to smash. Must have you up at once, or we shall both be broken."

"Anything to pay?" asked Val, grinding his teeth at the clumsiness of the message.

"Five shillings, sir," said the footman.

Val gave him the money, and dismissed him.

"I can't show this to anybody!" he cried aloud, crossing the room ill-temperedly. "What a fool a man must be to send such a message!" He was so eager to stay, so unwilling to go, that he was ready to catch at any straw of self-delusion. He tried to persuade himself that since he could not reasonably show to anybody this ridiculous message, he could not allow it to call him away; but he was not yet so blind as to allow that fraud to pass. "Shall I go?" he asked himself. "I must go." He paced to and fro in the room. "I can't go." Reginald Jolly's words came somehow into his mind. "You are always in the primrose way," and his own flippant answer, "I like primroses." He stood still in a sudden hot rebellion against Fate. "Let it lead me where it will, I take the primrose way. The other road is too thorny. Yet, where will this way lead? Where will it lead?" He clinched his hands and dropped them by his side, and said very quietly and softly, "Let it lead me where it will, I take it." He tore the telegram through and through, until his hands had no grip upon it to tear it further, and cast the fragments broadcast on the floor. Then he went

slowly down-stairs, and meeting Reginald in the hall, he said languidly, "Rags, old man, I think a little stir in the open would do me good. Will you come down to the warren and have a pot at the rabbits for an hour?"

Reginald assented, with a look of some anxiety at Val's face. Folly is not only left unjustified of all her children, but she rarely manages to justify herself to them, or even enable them to justify themselves to themselves. A man born and bred within Folly's kingdom is sometimes happy there. You may almost unfailingly know him by his smug contentment. He knows no other boundaries. His own walks content him. He mocks wisdom, and disdains humailty. His conversational chalk-stones are to him more precious than the rubies of the wise. He is wise in his own conceit. Like Dogberry, he prays you, write him down an ass. It is his glory to be bald. Like the fox that lost his tail in the fable, he would fain have you also shorn. One touch of wisdom would ruin his complacency. But for a man born outside the demense of folly, to stray into it, is to walk into a very atmosphere of misery. "Let it lead me where it will, I take the primrose way." There will come a day, Val Strange, when no road could seem more awful to your eyes than that flowery path wherein your feet are set. Glad youth who mayest read this story, and haply take pleasure in it, I, thy poor lop-sided fellow-creature, who, with Hamlet, may own to having more offenses at my back than thoughts to put them in—I, who can put on no garb of saintliness, am not constituted the preacher of any sect, bid thee have pity on thyself that is to be, and cheerish Honor as thy friend. So shall the primrose spring *behind* thee—in sweet companionship with all sweet flowers—and when thy frequent feet in age shall travel again where thou hast trodden in thy heedful youth, the way shall be gracious, thy going shall be pleasant, and thy heart at rest. But still Will Waterproof's song is not without proof:

> [For] others' follies teach us not;
> Nor much their wisdom teaches:
> And most, of sterling worth, is what
> Our own experience preaches.

And every man must dree his own weird, and fight his own giants, to slay them, or to be led to captivity, as he himself may choose.

"You look wretched, Val," said the little man, laying a friendly hand on him. "What is it?"

"I am worried and unwell," said Val, ready to vent himself on anybody, and really angry at Gilbert. "I've just had a most idiotic telegram from a fellow in town. I suppose he regards himself as a practical joker, and thinks it fun to wire disturbing nonsense to a fellow. Wants me to go to London."

"If it's at all important," said Reginald, "don't think about the theatricals. We can let them slide easily enough. Who is it?"

"That ass, Gilbert," said Val, unguardedly. "It's a thing of no importance." Just then a man came racing down the field they had just entered, bearing in one hand a salver and in the other a buff envelope.

"For me?" asked Reginald.

"No, sir," gasped the man; "for Mr. Strange." He placed the envelope on the salver, and handed it to Val, who opened it, read it at a glance, and burst into an execration. "No chaff in last wire," ran the message. "Things really awfully serious. Come up at once." Val impetuously tore the missive into a hundred pieces. The servant gaped at him in open wonder.

"What are you standing and staring there for, you impudent scoundrel?" cried Val, catching sight of him suddenly.

"Five shillings for porterage, sir," returned the servant; "mounted messenger, sir."

"Hang the five shillings!" shouted Val, inconsequently, as he handed to the man, or rather half threw at him, a half-sovereign. "Keep the change, confound you!"

"Gentleman's bark ain't very dreadful," mused the servitor, as he departed; "and he haven't got a bite in him, seemin'ly."

"Val," said Reginald, "what is it? Can I be of any use to you?"

"It's nothing," said Strange, laughing vexedly. "I ought to be able to take a joke with better temper, however stupid it might be. Come along, and let us have a pot at the bunnies."

"Of course I know nothing about the matter," said Reginald; "but is there a chance of its not being a joke after all?"

"I tell you," cried Strange pettishly, "there's nothing in it." And Reginald said no more, and they crossed the field in silence. Val had no care for sport, and having had two or three chances, and having missed them all, he sat upon a tree-trunk and smoked discontentedly. "Fly while you may," the inward monitor whispered. "Fly from this enchantmant, lest it madden you." The whisper never left him. "Go!" it urged him—"go! It is your only safety." Reginald, meeting with better success than his companion, was keenly set upon the pleasure of the hour; and having hallooed once or twice to him, and received no response, wandered wide of where Strange sat.

"Mister Reginald!" shouted a panting voice.

"Hillo!" he cried in answer. "This way."

A serving-man came bursting through the bushes of a neighboring spinney. "Is Mr. Strange along with you, sir?" he panted. "Here's another telegram, sir."

Reginald smiled, and lifting his voice on high, called aloud to his friend.

"Hillo!" roared the recluse in answer; and guided by his voice, the two made way toward him.

"Here's another message," said the bald-headed youth, grinning broadly. "Excuse me for laughing, but it's too comic."

"Is it?" said Val, sardonically. Again the mythic Browne of 13 Mount Street insisted upon his return: "Your affairs menaced on all hands. Necessary to consult Boyd at once. Wire answer. Come up by next express. Urgent." This time the recipient of the telegram dropped his hands like one resigned. "Anything for porterage?"

"Yes, sir," the man responded; "five shillings, sir."

"Ah! Have you change, Jolly? Thanks. Tell the messenger," he said to the man, "that if any more telegrams come for me to-day, they can wait until the letter-bag is sent up. Look at that, Rags," he continued, languidly, handing the telegram to him. "That's the third I've had to-day. Isn't it enough to make a man angry?"

"Who's Boyd?" asked Reginald.

"I don't know Boyd from Adam," Val returned.

"Hillo!" cried Reginald suddenly. "Look here, Val. There must be something in it after all. You said it was Gilbert who sent the others. This is from Browne, of No. 13 Mount Street."

Val blushed a little at this; but answered quietly and wearily: "That, I suppose, is part of the joke. I don't know anybody named Browne. I don't know Mount Street. Where *is* Mount Street? Who is Browne? Did I say Gilbert? Gilbert East, I meant. Ah, you don't know him." Oh, Val Strange, Val Strange, that a man once honorable should lie so glibly! But somehow the atmosphere of the primrose way sets Honor off to sleep, as the air in the Enchanted Grounds did with the Pilgrims in Bunyan's allegory.

"I can't conceive," said Reginald, "that any man would be such an ass as to send a message like this without a meaning. I should go and see what is the matter. You can catch the one o'clock train, and be back here by three o'clock to-morrow. There *might* be something in it. There *must* be something in it!"

Here were accidents urging Val to his salvation, and the inward voice urged him: "Go! it is your only safety! Go!" And for the moment it so far triumphed with him that he answered: "Yes; I think I'll run up, if it's only for the pleasure of horsewhipping Gilbert—East." The pause was scarcely noticeable; but the bald-headed youth was keen, and there was something in this whole matter which went beyond his penetration for the present, and piqued his curiosity.

"Yes," he said with his keen eyes on Val's face, "I think I should horsewhip Gilbert—East." Val's color changed ever so little. "What is it?" asked Reginald of himself. "He is making a mystery of something or other. Well, it's no affair of mine."

"Come," said Val, taking up his gun; "let us go up to the house. I must pack. He tried to hope that, being once away from the attraction which so strenuously held him, he might be able to stop away altogether.. Perhaps he began to find the primrose way already thorny. They went up to the house silently; and Val having ordered his own man to pack his portmanteau, made his excuses to his host, and started.

Reginald drove him to the station. "Let me know," said he, as the train came clanking in, "if it's all right when you get there. I shall be anxious till I hear."

Strange promised; and in another minute was rolling toward London.

CHAPTER XV.

"SHE LOVES ME. I SHALL WIN HER YET."

"PERHAPS," thought Strange, as the train bore him swiftly toward the great metropolis, "it is the best thing that could have happened that Gilbert should have carried his jest so far. I can't step in between Lumby and the woman he is going to marry. And yet—she does not love him. It's the merest marriage of convenience. She brightens when I go near her, and Lumby's coming makes her dull at once. (And this was not his egotism, but the simple truth.) "I can't leave her! Never see her again?" Oh, vacant world! Let any man who has loved, remember what such a prospect seemed to him in the hot-blooded days of youth. The conflicting purposes in his mind so tore him, that by the time at which the train reached the terminus, his nerves were trembling and twitching, and he was so irritable as to be downright hungry for a quarrel with anybody who might present himself. He had chambers in town, which he had for the past year used rarely, and to them he dispatched his man, whilst he himself took a cab and sought out Gilbert. That ardent chum lived in Dane's Inn; and Val, eagerly dashing from his cab, rushed up the court-yard, nearly overturning the old Crimean commissionaire in his haste, and reaching Gilbert's door, rained such a shower of blows upon it, that the startled echoes rolled and tumbled over one another down the darkened staircase, in their haste to answer. Mr. Gilbert in person responded to this urgent summons.

"Hillo, Val! That's you, old man. Delivered from the house of bondage, eh?" Strange glared at him from the semi-darkness; but the expression of his face being unseen by Gilbert, that young gentleman flowed on: "Come in. Had to take strenuous measures—hadn't I? Thought I'd make 'em strong enough to lift you. Come in."

"You unmitigated ass!" said Val, fairly boiling over.

"Eh?" said Gilbert. "Oh!" A slow smile lit up his broad mid-England countenance. "Overdid it a bit, eh?"

"What did you mean by piling message on message in that idiotic way?"

"Here's gratitude," said Gilbert, with appealing hands spread abroad. "Here's a specimen of thankfulness for friendship's toils!—Come in," he continued, clawing Val by the shoulder and dragging him into the little hall. "Three shillings for expenses; and sixpence for a drink to the commissionaire. You can't grumble at that—three journeys—twopence a journey. Hand over." Val walked up and down in the sitting-room, heaping contumely on the overzealous Gilbert. "Three-and-six," was that gentleman's sole response to all objurgations.

Strange, taking an inward survey of himself became conscious of his own condition, and made an effort after calmness. "I don't want to quarrel," he said.

"No?" interjected the stolid Gilbert incredulously.

"Don't irritate me, there's a good fellow. I've had one or two things to disturb me, and the last straw may break the back of human patience."

"You give me three shillings for the telegrams," said Mr. Gilbert, humorously," and pay me back the sixpence I gave the commissionaire, and I'll let the matter sleep."

"There's your money," cried Val, throwing it on the table. "Don't speak to me again."

Mr. Gilbert gathered up the money and threw it out of the open window. "Don't you go into any more dull houses," he answered; "or if you do, don't ask me to lug you out of 'em!" Val was striding from the room; but Gilbert laid a hand upon his shoulder. "Look here, Val," he said; "a joke's a joke."

"And an ass, an ass," said Val in answer, and disappeared majestic.

"Mr. Strange!" cried Gilbert, following to the head of the staircase—Val was half-way down, and made no response—"Mr. Strange!" Val paused; perhaps Gilbert was going to propose a meeting, to avenge his outraged feelings. "You'll find your three-and-sixpence in the courtyard, Mr. Strange," said Gilbert, in a voice of smoothest courtesy, and thereafter he exploded into a peal of laughter, which echoed up and down the hollow staircase, and pursued the unhappy Val half-way to the entrance of the Inn.

Driving to his own rooms, the young man found their solitude unbearable, and wandered aimlessly into the

streets. There any chance object caught his eye and claimed attention with a foolish exigence which irritated him, though he submitted to it. A porcelain vase in a shop window, a looking-glass surrounded by diminutive Cupids and Brobdingnagian wreaths of flowers; a coal-scuttle; the presentment of an imbecile Madonna framed in smoke-dried oak, and otherwise striving to look old; the exposed steel of a case of surgical instruments—anything seemed to be good enough to stare at. He wasted a little vacant observation upon each of these things, and upon many more, until, pausing to examine, with needless curiosity, a thermometer which hung in an Oxford Street optician's window, and having slaked that futile interest, he was about to turn away, when suddenly beside the thermometer, he saw a face which all this time had dwelt within his thoughts. It was a cabinet photograph, and so life-like an expression that it almost startled him. For one minute he was amazed, but in the next he became angry. By what right did any rascally shop-keeper dare to exhibit this sacred face to the public gaze? He was ready to quarrel with anybody, and entered the shop. Luckily, there were one or two people there already and he had time to cool. He had no right to ask an account of the shopman; but being there, he must do something, and so, in place of making a disturbance about the photograph, he bought it. With the lovely face lying against his heart, he walked homeward. Reaching his own rooms, he set the photograph before him, and looked at it long and eagerly. Beautiful, impassive, smiling, it looked back at him, and the fancy which passion has always at command gave it life and color. Fate beckoned him as he looked, and her gesture was imperative, because he was willing to obey her. When men choose to yield Fate is always imperative.

Seeking, amongst a lot of tumbled papers in a drawer, for an envelope large enough to hold the photograph, he found but one, on the back of which were scrawled a number of lines, which he remembered once to have been chosen haphazard from Shakespeare for mottoes in some Christmas sport. They had been written in pencil, with one exception, and were now faded and half illegible. The one exception was a line of *Longaville's* in "Love's Labor's Lost"—"Thy grace being gained, cures all disgrace in me."

"There is my motto," said Val. "Thy grace being gained, cures all disgrace in me." He kissed the photograph, and put it in the envelope, and sealed it there. He had no more doubts about going back now. He had no plans, no resolves. What would come, might come; and he was content henceforth to drift with the tide, and to go withersoever it might carry him. And being in haste to meet Fate half-way, he called suddenly to mind the fact that he had ample time to catch the midnight mail; and having instructed his servant to meet him at the station, he consigned the sealed envelope to his breast-pocket, and strolled slowly thither. He had no longer any will to fight against his love; and he put away all thoughts of Gerard from his mind, and was at peace in his Fool's Paradise.

He reached the Grange next morning, and spoke lightly of his call to town as a stupid jest, and stayed out the remainder of the time, meeting each day with Constance. Mr. Jolly's time of festivity was coming to an end; his guests were preparing for flight; and at last the close came, and Val must go back into the world which had now no light for him.

On the last day he was alone with Constance for a few minutes. She was at the piano, playing scraps of melody, and breaking abruptly away from them, as though her mind was somewhat restless. Val, standing near her, spoke, as lightly as he could.

"So we all fly away to-morrow," he said, "owl, jackdaw, and bird of paradise."

"Yes," she said, looking round at him with a languid smile. "It is a pity. The pleasantest times come to an end. The house will be dull for a little time to come."

"Yes," said Val, "I suppose so." She went on playing softly. "Those dancing chips," he quoted, "o'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait."

"How quaintly pretty!" she said, looking round again. "Whose is that?"

"It is from one of Shakespeare's sonnets," he answered. He longed to speak the whole of it, but had not courage. The mere want of daring to do so little, spurred him, and stung him so that in a second he was ready to do all. "Constance!" he murmured, and she turned again and looked at him. Her face was suddenly pale, and there

was a visible fear in her beautiful eyes. "I can not go away without a word." Her eyes drooped as his gazed passionately into them; the blood surged up to her face and left it pale again. "If you loved the man you are pledged to marry"—the floodgates once open ever so little, farewell restraint—"I could not speak. How dare I? But you do not love him, and it is no dishonor in me that I plead my cause. I have loved you from the hour when I first saw you. I tried to go away. The telegrams that came a fortnight ago were sent at my request, to call me to London, away from you. I went; but I could not stay. My heart dragged me back again. I can not live without you."

She rose pale and trembling, and stood before him. "By what right," she asked, still with lowered eyes, "do you speak to me so? Might it not have been more honorable to have made your first appeal to Gerard—to your friend?"

He turned ghastly pale at that rebuke, and the room whirled round with him. He reached out a pair of trembling hands and seized on the piano.

"No, no!" she said. "I did not mean to be so cruel. Go! Forgive me. Leave me. Yon must never speak such words to me again. Let us never meet again, for pity's sake."

He looked at her doggedly, seeing her as if through a shining mist. "You love *me*," he said, "and not Gerard."

At that instant, Reginald's voice was heard below calling "Constance!" With one sweeping gesture, she commanded him from the room.

He passed out at one door; and she, with a motion that seemed the mere continuation of her gesture, left by another. But as they went each gave a backward glance, and again their eyes met. "Constance!" cried the voice below. She waved her hand once more against him, and was gone. He passed upward to his own chamber.

"She loves me," he murmured. "I shall win her yet!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"THIS IS MY FUTURE PARTNER, LADIES."

THE dining-room at Lumby Hall was a place furnished for solid comfort's sake and with no regard for show. The

walls, the ceiling, and the floor were all of oak. Dark maroon hangings kept a certain air about the chamber, as though to say that eating was not a busy matter here, but a thing to be done in shaded peace, and at what leisure the diner would. The oak floor, save for an edging some foot and a half in width, was deeply carpeted. The pictures on the walls were dull with time. The dim gold of their heavy frames relieved the somber shades of the oak paneling, but had no gewgaw quarrel with their age, as any modern gilding would have had. There was no new electro'd look on the silver stands and candelabra. The eyes of ornamental Cupids had grown dark: there were streaks of darkness in the Cupid's silver hair; their noses had grown blunt with the chamois leather of generations of butlers. All things wore a look of comfortable age. Sitting here, you were out of all disturbing influence, unless you were outside of it in the literal sense of carrying it within you. There is no great comfort in new things. A new chair, stiff and shiny, sets one's teeth on edge with the creak of its leather, yet untrained to yield. Your old chair has found out all your angles, and is ready to adapt itself to a stranger's. Old shoes, old coats, old wines, old friends, what comfort there is in them! In the society of an old friend, you can lounge as you do in an old jacket; you have no fear of taking the gloss off him, or it. There is a sense of comfort, of long human proprietorship, which has left even it not unmarked with human interest, in old furniture. Not as it stares forlornly at you from the dim dustiness of half-fictitious years in Wardour Street shop windows; but as it stands where it has been wont to stand, in any old chamber familiar to a family. The chairs in which generations of the same house have sat, the table at which genations have dined, the solid square decanters out of which great-grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers poured mirth and jollity—what are new things beside them?

Gerard and his father sat here, well content in the after-dinner hour, the old man sipping his glass of port, the younger his glass of claret.

"And so," said the senior, balancing the nut-crackers, and looking across the table with a humorous air, "you won't come up to London?"

"If you wish it, I will come," answered Gerard. "Otherwise I don't care for it."

"Oh," hummed the old boy, not unmelodiously, "'There's nothing half so sweet in life as Love's young dream.'" In his youth he had had a famous tenor voice, which, though now a trifle husky, had still something of its old mellow flavor left in it.

Gerard looked up at him, and laughed affectionately. "Well, dad," he said, "why not? You had your day." There was a little blush upon his face, which was not unbecoming, going, as it did, with such a friendly candor in his eyes.

"Yes," the old boy answered, for good port disposes the heart to sentiment, "I have had my day. I thank God for a tranquil afternoon, and the promise of a quiet evening." They were both silent for a minute or two, and then he said, in his usual tone: "I'm afraid I must drag you away, my lad, but only for a day. I've been talking things over with your mother; and since you are going to get married, and can't very well do that on your allowance, I have thought of taking you over into the House, and transferring to you, say half my share in it. You need never meddle with the business. I would rather you didn't meddle with it. So long as Garling lasts, at least, it couldn't be in better hands. When I am gone, except for Milly's share, you will have everything; but I sha'n't follow King Lear's pattern even with so good a lad as you are. So I shall run up to town to-morrow, have a talk with Garling—see exactly how I stand—and then go to Bryan, and get him to draw up the necessary papers; and then you must beg away for a day, and come up for the completion of the business." Gerard would have thanked him, but he went on, "And now I've had wine enough, and I'm going upstairs. Are you coming?" They rose together, and left the room arm in arm. "This is my future partner, ladies," said Lumby senior, entering the drawing-room. "We must have new blood in the business."

Mrs. Lumby rose and kissed her son, a little tremulously. They were a most united household, and had great love for each other. The coming change had cast a sort of tender shadow on them all. Gerard's marriage would bring about their first real parting.

In the morning, Lumby père, in the highest spirits, started for London. It is fine to see a mellow-hearted man

living over the morning of his days again in the knowledge of his son's felicities; and old Lumby was a pleasant sight. Snowy whiskers; beaming British countenance, handsomer by far in its well-preserved beginning of age than it had ever been in youth; ancient satin stock, voluminous, with shining buckle behind; white high collar, meeting the silver of his whiskers; hat broad-brimmed, and not too glossy; figure clad in dull broadcloth, not too portly, but square and solid—the beau-ideal of a country gentleman. Arrived in London, he drove to one of those city hostels, once numerous, but disappearing now, if the last of them has not already gone, where the solid mahogany tables and sideboards looked liquid with the polish of a century; where the butler had known the fathers of all but the most ancient guest, and remembered the room you slept in when you first came up to London; where the table linen was all of the finest, the whitest, and the costliest, and in whose cellars, port "elbow deep in saw-dust slept, as old as Waterloo." Most people like to be considered somebody, and the very Boots in this ancient hostel knew the House of Lumby and Lumby, and reverenced its head. He would have been a mere unit in a crowd at the Langham, and even there the port could have been no better. When, after luncheon, he walked down to the offices of the firm, the old servitor at the door capped him with a smile; the elder clerks bowed gravely; the younger, with a sense of awe, bent lower at their figures, and sent their quills across the paper with increasing assiduity of aspect; and the old gentleman came, in short, like a little monarch of feudal times to his own. His heart was glad in his only son, and he was humbly grateful that it was in his power to lift him above all little worldly anxieties, and to set him in the way to happiness. In the fullness of his heart, he stopped to speak to the oldest of the clerks, who had known him when he was a lad, and had gray whiskers when *his* father had first inducted him into the honor of a share in the firm.

"It is like old times to see you here, sir," said the honored clerk.

"Ah!" said Mr. Lumby, "it is like old times to *be* here. Where is Garling?"

"He is out at present, sir," said the clerk: "we expect him to return at once."

"Mr. Gerard is coming into the firm," said Mr. Lumby,

with genial pride. "These landmarks in life show us how old we are growing—eh, Johnson?"

"They do, indeed, sir," said the ancient clerk, flattered to be the first to hear the news. "I remember your coming very well, sir. *You* were Mr. Gerard then."

"You have spent a pretty good slice of your life here, Johnson, eh?"

"You may say that, sir," said the old clerk, with a tremulous quaver in his old voice. "Fifty years to-day, sir."

"Nonsense!" cried Mr. Lumby.

"Fifty years to-day!" the old clerk repeated. "Half a century, sir. I came here on my fifteenth birthday, and I am sixty-five to-day."

"Happy returns!" said the head of the firm, offering his hand, which the old man took gratefully. "Happy returns! Will you come and dine with me to-night, if you have no other engagement?"

"I shall be honored, sir," the old clerk answered.

We have new-fangled ways now. Perhaps they are better than the old; but the affectionate veneration of the ancient servitor is rarely now to be seen in these fast-rolling days.

"Shall we say six o'clock? Very well. We'll have a talk over old times, eh? You won't forget?" The idea of his forgetting!

Mr. Lumby went upstairs, and walked into his own room, where he rang for the "Times," and sat down to wait for Garling. It was a square little room, hung on three sides with maps, and crowded with one big table and two heavy chairs. One side of it was of corrugated glass and wooden frame-work, and in this was a sliding door. Beyond this thin partition was Garling's room. Mr. Lumby read his "Times," and waited, with a comfortable heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

"YOU'VE GOT TWO NAMES, HAVE YOU?" THOUGHT HIRAM.

HIRAM SEARCH had had some reason to think the world a hardish patch to hoe, to copy the figurative locution of his native land. It had never been easy since he could re-

member, and of late years it had been full of struggles, which were mostly failures, to make both ends meet. But it is not until a man has tasted happiness that he can appreciate the full flavor of misery. Happily, the reverse also holds good, and a man can find the finer flavors of happiness when misery has cleansed his palate. For a little space, Hiram, like his betters, had been happy, and now came trouble, all the more troublous, as it always has been, for coming on smooth times. The daily crust must somehow be earned, and Hiram was away early and home late, though Mary sat crying at home, awaiting the funeral of her mother. Her father redeemed his promise, and took the funeral charges on himself. It was a poor and simple show, and no mourner followed the plain coffin. Garling paid for it, such as it was, and gave Mary a five-pound note.

"You will hold yourself in readiness for me," he said; "and I shall come for you in a day or two. I must make arrangements to receive you." He gave her an arctic kiss, and went his way; and she, feeling quite desolate, strayed about the empty house, and longed for Hiram's protecting presence. It was midnight when he came.

"We can't go on in this way, my darlin'," he told her. "You must give me the right to protect you. 'Tain't provident, I know; but there air some situations when it's wise to be *im*provident, an' this is one of 'em. We shall have to be careful an' savin'; but we have both had practice at that; an' I fancy I can allays find us in a roof an' vittles."

"Not yet," she pleaded tearfully; "I couldn't marry so soon after mother's death."

"We must find you cheerful lodgin's," said Hiram; "an' I must begin to turn round pretty sharp, an' look for some other kind o' labor, an' when I've got it, we must be married as soon as possible. 'Tain't to be thought on, as I should leave you alone in the world a minute longer'n I can help."

"But Hiram," she said timidly, clinging to him—"my father?"

"Wall," said Hiram, looking on a sudden as hard and as keen as a razor, "what about him?"

"He is coming to take me away," she answered.

"Is he?" said Hiram. "Air you goin' with him? No,

my blossom. I don't want to speak any harm of him; but he's got no claim over you or your doin's—none. His noo-born yearnin's 'll ha' to wait, I fancy. He choked 'em down, it seems, for nigh on a score o' years, an' now he can jest keep on chokin' 'em for my convenience."

"He is coming to take me away with him," she said.

Hiram treated this lightly. "Don't go with him," he answered, and thought that question settled. Then he kissed her tenderly, and went up to bed, but not to sleep. How to make a living? Such a living as would leave some margin over bare necessity; something, not luxury, but comfort, for his dear little girl. He could make nothing of the problem yet, and the schemes he devised had all some flaw in them.

The afternoon of the next day, being Saturday, brought Garling back again. "I am here," he said, "to take you home." She shrunk from him. "Are you ready?"

"No," she answered, in fear of him.

He sat down, saying coldly, with an air of reproof, that he would wait until she had finished her preparations.

"But," she said, scarcely knowing how she found courage enough to say it, "I am not going."

"You are in error," he answered, dryly. "Get ready at once, if you please."

With a sort of desperation, such as a mouse might feel as if in extremity it found the heart to face a terrier, she said again: "I am not going. I have promised not to go."

"You have promised? Whom have you promised?" he asked, looking darkly at her from beneath his brows.

"I have promised not to go," she repeated with hysteric courage.

"You are of course aware," he said, coldly, "that I, as your father, have complete control over you until you come of age. You are not yet twenty, and my control will continue for at least fifteen months. I promised your mother that I would exercise it, and I will."

"Why did you leave us?" she panted. "Why should I trust you to be good to me? I will not go."

"Your mother," he responded, coldly as ever, "could have told you why I left you. I am a man, and can not speak scandal of the dead."

"You speak scandal," she panted back again, "in saying that you can not speak it. I won't believe it—I don't

believe it. My mother was a good woman, and you left her—you left her cruelly. I will not go with you."

He had cared little enough to take her; but scoundrel as he was, he had not had the heart to refuse her mother's prayer; and though he had striven to beat that feeling down, he had it in his mind that there was some terror in wait for him if he should break his promise. But though he came reluctantly enough, the girl's opposition decided him as firmly as though her society were a necessity of life to him. Her reiterated refusal spurred his halting purpose. It was years since anybody had disputed an order of his, and the denial stirred his blood pleasantly.

"It is not a matter," he said calmly, "in which you can exercise a choice. I order, and you must obey." He kept his eyes upon her until hers sunk before them. He knew the virtue of that stony glance of old. It had helped to break her mother's spirit, and to make her the mere creature of his will. "I wish to treat you kindly," he went on, "but I shall insist upon obedience, instant and complete. My method is decisive in all matters. I give you ten minutes in which to make ready. If you are not ready in that time, you will go as you are."

"I will not go," she protested wildly.

"You do not understand. Permit me to explain. I have a legal right over you. The first policeman in the street will see you into my cab at my order."

What was she to do? She knew no better. "What have I ever done to you," she cried. "I have lived by my own earnings, and I can do so still. You were cruel to my mother, and you broke her heart, and now—".

"And now," he said, "time flies. Obey me. Not a word, at your peril."

Cowed by the brutal and contemptuous tone, and not able to guess how far his rights might stretch, or how far he would carry them, she left the room, and, blinded with tears, mounted the staircase. Suddenly, as she stood disconsolate in her chamber, shaken with her own weeping, she clasped her hands at a thought, and, falling on her knees, drew, from a shabby papered box which held all her belongings, a sheet of paper and a pencil. "DEAR HIRAM," she wrote, "My father is here. I am obliged to go. Pray, oh, pray find me. Live here, and I will send you my address; but he will watch me. MARY."

She crept on tiptoe to Hiram's room, and pinned the paper to his pillow, and then crept back again. Ah, there was hope! Hiram was clever, and brave, and strong. He would find her, and deliver her. She could surely manage to convey to him the news of her whereabouts; and he would find her, though the cruel father buried her underground. She knew nothing of the world; but why was she a woman, but to know that it would be wisest now to play at resignation? She packed with trembling fingers, in haste, as though every hurried motion brought Hiram and her rescue nearer. When she descended, her father sat with his watch in his hand.

"You are ready? Where is your luggage?" She told him; and he called in the driver of the cab which stood before the door and ordered him to bring it down. "Come," he said to his daughter, with cold discourtesy; "get in first." She passed the threshold; and he, having dropped the hasp which held back the main lock, followed, and they were driven away.

When Hiram returned that night at his usual hour, the door was locked against him. But he, being a man of expedients, and unwilling to disturb Mary, dropped over into the area, and entered by the kitchen door, supposing that the hasp had fallen by accident. There was nothing to warn him of his sweetheart's disappearance, except that his candle was not in its usual place upon its ledge in the narrow hall; but he disregarded that, and crept silently upstairs. He struck a light in his own room, and glancing round it, saw the paper on his pillow. By the flame of the match, he read "Dear Hiram," and the name by which the note was signed. Before he could master a word beyond this, his frail light went out. He had no other; and in his anxiety to read the missive he crept quietly down-stairs, not guessing even yet that he was alone in the house, and that the jewel which made it like a casket to his mind, had been stolen away. The night was dusty, and the wind in sudden bursts moaned up and down the streets like a houseless wanderer, uncertain where to go. He could find no light in the kitchen; but remembering how he had entered, and hearing how the wind shook the thin latch, he shot the bolt; and mounting the stairs as noiselessly as a ghost, he opened the front door, and leaving it ajar, went on tiptoe to the nearest street lamp, and there read the letter.

Standing amazed and uncertain, with a chill sense of dismay upon him, he heard a sudden clap, which sounded like the explosion of a small cannon, and the wind came hurrying by with a hoarse rejoicing murmur. He darted back to the door, and found it closed. The house was locked against him.

This small disaster affected him curiously. It was like a bad omen; and he stood before the closed and deserted house like one whom the whole world has cast out. Shaking off his dejection, he walked, slowly at first, but more and more briskly as his thoughts shaped themselves and the mental way grew clear before him, to a coffee-house he knew; and paying his sixpence for a bed, retired, and in spite of trouble and anxiety, slept fairly. He was astir betimes in the morning; and having secured a half-sheet of note-paper and a few wafers, he wrote, "Letters next door at No. 97," and walking to the house, fastened that legend over the letter-slip. Then came the routine of the day. Every time the omnibus passed the house in Fleet Street in which were situated the chambers of that Mr. Martial to whom Hiram had once carried a message, the conductor mounted to the roof of his vehicle and stood there, scanning the windows eagerly. That afternoon—so simple seemed the knot which Hiram had to untie—he saw Mary, caught her glance, and exchanged a signal with her. But he could not leave his post; and though he passed the house again twice before the daylight faded, he saw her no more. On the morrow he secured a substitute to perform his duties, but was informed by a superior official that if this kind of thing went on he would be dismissed.

"If that's so," said Hiram, "I shall be sorry; but it is as may be." It was but a poor way of earning a living, after all, and he was every day more anxious to break from it. Perhaps if he could once be bold enough to leave it, he would pitch upon something better. He rode up to the house, dropped from the omnibus, and rang the bell. After some delay, Garling himself responded to the summons. He was dressed for the streets; and after one keen glance at Hiram, he came out, closed the door behind him, and walked eastward, as calmly as though his visitor had been invisible. Hiram followed; and at the touch of a finger on his shoulder, Garling stopped and faced about.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"A word with you," said Hiram in reply.

"It was you," thought Garling in his secret mind, "to whom she gave the promise not to go." But he only said aloud: "Speak your word;" and turned upon his heel again, leaving Hiram to follow. If he hoped to shake off the intruder, he was mistaken; the unwelcome hand was again upon his shoulder, so firmly this time as to bring him to a stand-still.

"I want to see Miss Martial," said Hiram.

"Remove your hand, sir," returned Garling coldly. Hiram for sole answer moved him a little to and fro, as though to hint his own preparedness to shake a favorable answer out of him. "Officer!" said Garling. A policeman paused in passing. "This person annoys me." It was so icily done, with a self-possession so perfect, that for a second Hiram was confounded, and he permitted Garling to withdraw himself and walk on. His perplexity lasted for a second only, and he followed at an easy pace, satisfied for the present to allow the cashier a start of ten or a dozen yards. Garling, looking not to right or left, went calmly on, with his hands clasped behind him, as his habit was, and Hiram followed him. Garling, with his wry forbidding smile bent downward, surrendered his visitor as vanquished, and betook himself to thoughts of other things.

"Where you go, I go," said Hiram quietly within himself. "I'll have somethin' out of you afore I've done, as sure as water's wet." Treading in and out among the passengers, he pursued the figure in front, and never took his eyes from it. Garling moved aside for nobody, but walked slowly, as though in green meadows, with not a soul in view, and everybody made way for him—which is the triumph of your impassive and unyielding men. Along Fleet Street, up Ludgate Hill, through St. Paul's Churchyard, Hiram followed, and by this time treading pretty close on Garling's heels, pursued him into quiet Gresham Street.

"Mr. Garling," said a man in passing.

"Yes," said Garling, walking on.

The man turned and walked with him. "The 'Emerald Isle' sails this evening; but the whole consignment can not be completed until to-morrow. Shall we send part by the 'Emerald Isle,' or keep it all for the 'Ohio,' which sails on Wednesday?"

"Keep it for Wednesday," answered Garling, without looking round or pausing in his walk. It was wonderful how for twenty years this chill abstracted manner had kept everybody about the House of Lumby and Lumby in awe of him.

"You've got two names, have you?" thought Hiram. "That's a pull to begin with." The clerk who had addressed Garling had the air and manner of a gentleman, and the profound respect of his approach implied a high authority in the man he spoke to. At the wide door of the offices, the porter saluted Garling and received no response. On each side of the entrance was a small brass plate bearing the simple inscription, "Lumby and Lumby." The name struck a clear note in Hiram's memory. It was a man bearing that name who had lifted him out of the Slough of Despond less than half a year ago. He followed Garling, and no man spoke to him. The cashier had ceased to think of him; and if he noted the footsteps behind him at all, he took them for those of an employé of the House. And Hiram followed Garling so calmly, the clerks supposed that Garling knew of him, and had brought him to the office. Upstairs and along the corridor, and then through a little door went the cashier; and Hiram pursued leisurely. At the sound of Hiram's entering footsteps, Garling turned. A flash of surprise passed over his face and left it calm again. He rang the bell; and a clerk came in response to it.

"Bring a policeman," said the cashier calmly.

The clerk, with a glance at Hiram, retired.

"I am not alarmed," said Hiram quietly; "an' now we air here alone, we can have it out together quiet and comfortable; can't we, mister? Very well, then. Here's the case *as* it stands. Your cards air these: You've got the little gell in your own hands, an' you're her father. My cards air: That you married in a false name; that you let the wife of your bosom starve to death if it hadn't been for the charity o' strangers; an' that you air open to a charge of abduction. Honest folk don't kerry aliases, Mr. Garling-Martial or Martial-Garling, or what your name is. While you're calling for a policeman, you'd best give a wholesale order, an' have enough to take the pair of us. I charge you with abduction. If you have a right to the little gell,

you have to prove it. You can establish your claim, mister, by admitting an illegal marriage."

This was a bold shot; but it hit the very white of Hiram's expectations. A gray hue crept cloudily over the natural colors of Garling's face, and he fixed a deadly glance on Hiram.

"Look as ugly as you can, mister," said the unwelcome visitor, calmly. "Nature's hand has been bountiful in that direction. Walk in, officer."

"Wait down-stairs," said Garling to the policeman standing in the door-way. "What do you want of me, when all is said?" he asked of Hiram.

"I want my plighted wife, Miss Mary Martial, out of your wicked clutches," he responded.

"If I refuse to surrender her?" asked Garling.

"Then I go to the first police court," returned Hiram, "an' charge you with abduction by force."

"What proof have you that she came unwillingly?"

"A letter in her own handwriting."

"Will you show me that letter?"

"Yes," said Hiram; "I will hold it up afore you. But if you offer to lay a hand on it, I shall prob'ly twist your wicked head off." He held up the note, and Garling read it.

"What position have you to maintain a wife?" he asked.

"That is not the point," said Hiram, folding up the letter. "I've got the whip-hand, Mr. Martial, an' I'm goin' to exercise my power, Mr. Garling. Get up. You don't want Lumby an' Lumby to know your villainies, you hoary-headed reprobate." Another shaft discharged at half hap-hazard; but it entered Garling's heart, and Hiram saw it, impassive as he was to look at. "High in the confidence of a respectable British house, 'taint wholesome to be foolin' round, marryin' onder false names, and' starvin' wives, an' abductin' gells!"

How much, thought Garling, did the man know? How much guess-work? He was too dangerous to be trifled with. "Come to the point," said Garling. "What do you want to do?"

"I want you to come now, without a minute's loss, an' surrender Miss Mary Martial to my care. An' if you delay one minute by the clock, I bring my charge."

"Come with me," said Garling, rising; and they left the room together.

"What horrible mystery is here?" said the head of the great firm, sitting white and wonder-stricken in the next apartment. Every word had reached him. "*Garling* under an alias. GARLING!" Incredible! "Married? Left his wife to starve?" Incredible again. And true, for he himself admitted it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"UNDERHAND?"

THE ancient Johnson, servitor of the great House for half a century, presented himself in due time at the old-fashioned city hostel and asked for Mr. Lumby. Mr. Lumby had not yet arrived, and the old clerk sat down in his private room to wait. There was a mingling of early twilight with gaslight in the street, and the room itself was somber with much old mahogany. As he waited, the gaslights in the street grew brighter, and the shadows in the room grew deeper. The silence and the shadows and the waiting became in the course of time quite unendurable, and the clerk rang for lights.

"Did Mr. Lumby name any time for returning?" he asked.

"No, sir; not particular," said the waiter. "Leastways, I think not. I'll inquire." The waiter drew the blinds, stirred the fire, and having lingered a little, left the room with that air of foiled expectation peculiar to his tribe. Coming again in the course of a few minutes, he said that Mr. Lumby had left no word behind him as to the hour at which he would return.

"That is curious," said the old clerk, with a sort of tremulous disappointed dignity. "He asked me to dine with him at six this evening."

"Sing'lar," said the waiter, with raised eyebrows; "very sing'lar. Shall I bring you anythin' while you wait, sir? A glass of sherry and a biscuit now?" suggested the waiter, with an almost filial interest.

"Yes," said Johnson, and sat there for another hour, crumbling his biscuit, and sipping, very, very slowly, at his sherry. Steps came and went upon the stairs, bells rang, voices ordered and voices answered, while Johnson sat wondering and waiting. A step came up the stairs,

and the clerk, with a sort of weary anger, inwardly declared that he knew it would go by. But this time it came straight to the room, and Mr. Lumby entered. The old clerk rose to greet him; but the head of the great House, who was a much bigger man than ancient Johnson, laid both hands upon his shoulders and half forced him into his seat again.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Johnson," he said. "I am afraid I have spoiled your dinner. But no man is altogether master of his time, and I have been detained. Let us see what they can do for us. Better late than never, eh, Johnson?"

"Better late than never, sir," returned the old clerk. "Better very late, indeed, sir, than not at all."

"Ay," said the head of the firm; "better very late indeed, than not at all." There was something in his tone which seemed to give the remark some greater significance than the occasion called for; and when the old clerk looked at his employer, he saw a shadow resting on his face, which he had never seen before. "Better very late indeed, than not at all." Lumby's voice trailed off, and the shadow deepened on his face. For a minute he stood absorbed in his own thoughts; and then, with a little shaking of the head, he roused himself, rang the bell, and entered into consultation with the waiter and the guest. Soup, sherry, fish, a bird, a cutlet, champagne, port. "Yessir," "yessir," as the items were told off; and the waiter was gone to put the orders into execution. Lean Johnson, ancient servitor, so felt his visage glow with satisfaction at the arrangements, that he blew his nose in a very big bandana to hide himself, and emerging from his silken refuge, betrayed no more than a twinkling eye might tell.

"And Mr. Gerard is coming into the House, sir?" said the clerk.

His employer's eyes were fixed upon the fire with a far-away look.

"Yes," he said, recalling himself, and shifting in his chair, like one who lets fall an invisible burden; "Mr. Gerard is coming into the House. He is going to be married, Johnson. I suppose you are a grandfather long ago?"

"No, sir," said the ancient servitor, gravely; "I am a single man."

"You should be quite an irreclaimable bachelor by

now?" said Mr. Lumby, with a laugh. "Eh, Johnson? Quite the bachelor!"

"Why, yes, sir," returned Johnson. "There are two or three of us in the House. Neale is almost on the shelf by now."

"Ah," said Lumby, gayly, "Neale is sixty, I should say."

"Fifty-eight, sir," answered the old clerk. "Then there's Barnes. Barnes is over fifty, young as he looks. And Mr. Garling, he's another of the hopeless cases. Eh, sir?"

There was a change in the countenance of the great man; and the shadow the clerk had noted there, came back again. "You would scarcely fancy Garling a marrying man," he answered.

"Why, no, sir," said Johnson. "Scarcely. Mr. Garling is all for business. A long head, sir. I hope you'll forgive the liberty I take, but I've always thought the House was fortunate in Mr. Garling, sir."

"Ye-es," said the head of the firm, lingering on the word, not doubtfully, but as if his thoughts dwelt on something else. "Is Garling popular?" he asked suddenly.

"Well, in a way, sir," said the old clerk. "He is looked up to. I should say he is as much looked up to as the Bank. People identify him with the House, sir. In another sense, we should hardly call him popular, perhaps. A very reserved man, sir, is Mr. Garling; not exactly haughty, but reserved."

"And quite a bachelor, eh, Johnson?"

"Oh, yes, sir, quite a bachelor," answered Johnson. "Almost as inveterate a bachelor as I am. He and Neale and Barnes and I are all in the same bag, I fancy, sir. We might make up a quartet party to sing, 'To keep single I contrive'—we four, sir." The old clerk laughed and rubbed his hands, half at his jest and half at the appearance of the waiter, who came in to lay the cloth; which being done, another waiter came in with a tureen, and another with a decanter of sherry, and a fourth with nothing but a napkin and an air of authoritative supervision.

"You need not wait," said Mr. Lumby; and the quartet withdrew itself—with lingering touches of decanter and table-cloth and salt-spoons—as though only half resigned

to leave a picture unfinished. "There are not many business men like Garling, eh, Johnson?"

"Well, sir," said Johnson, as if he tasted Garling with his soup, and after critical observation approved of him, "we think him quite unequaled. Business seems to be his very life, sir. Mr. Garling is not a man of whom I should be inclined to speak as a reveler, in any direction, but that's the only word that I can find. He seems to revel in business." It was evident that Johnson regarded the cashier with an unstinted veneration. With the first glass of champagne, the old clerk drank long life and happiness to Mr. Gerard; but he went back to Garling, and as the good viands and the cheerful wine warmed his elderly heart, he chanted his praises higher. "He doesn't work like a servant, sir, but like a master. You might think, to see how he works, that every business combination was intended to swell his own account at the Bank. But then, it's a delight to him, and that's one proof of his financial genius!"

If the ancient clerk had looked at his employer then, he might have seen the shadow deepen on his face; deepen, deepen, a shadow of mistrust and fear. The shadow of the cashier's ugly secret was on his heart, and fell outward on his face. Garling under an alias? Garling married? Garling starving his wife? Incredible. And true.

"Yes," he made answer after awhile, "he has always seemed absorbed in business—too much absorbed, perhaps, to be quite wholesome."

"Not a holiday for nine years, sir," said the old clerk. "It's wonderful, wonderful." The head of the firm sat silent, sipping at his wine. "And the business seems to absorb him altogether. Quite a lonely man."

Lumby stirred at that. "No friends?"

"Since young Martial died, more than twenty years ago, not one intimate friend, I believe, sir. Martial was managing clerk to Messrs. Beg, Batter, and Bagg, in Chancery Lane, sir, an eminent legal firm. A most able and promising young man. His death was a great blow to Garling, and I believe he has never formed a friendship since."

"Perhaps that speaks well for him, Johnson?" said Mr. Lumby in a questioning voice.

"I should say so, sir," the clerk responded—"decidedly, I should say so. Those stern and silent natures, sir, feel deeply." Elderly Johnson, with his own ancient heart

softened and warmed within him, was prepared to take almost a sentimental view of Garling's loneliness. The port was old, like Johnson's self, and all the mellow shine of the suns that glowed upon its parent grape lay snugly beaming in his bosom. Kindly Johnson, thus happy and thus honored, in private talk with the head of the great house, and sitting with his venerable legs beneath the same mahogany with him—why, at such an hour should he not think well of all men, and best of all of the captain of his troop—the troop he had served in now for half a century?

The cloud of distrust lifted and lightened ever so little in Lumby's mind—and fell again. The wife might have brought desertion on herself, might have deserved it all, and more. But then—the alias, the alias! The cloud thickened and fell lower yet. The talk strayed to other themes, and Lumby strove to take his part in it, and bore himself well enough to make Johnson believe him the most affable of men. And when at last the elderly clerk had gone with an envelope in his breast-pocket, sealed as yet and of unknown contents, the head of the House walked the apartment with troubled steps and bent head. The dialogue he had overheard between Garling and his unknown visitor troubled him terribly. He had trusted Garling so completely, that no doubt of his probity had ever lifted its head. He had respected him so profoundly, that the revelation of that afternoon had come upon him as a thing unbelievable. And being once shaken in his belief in the man, the business idol he had set up all these years in his own mind began to totter. Garling might still be honest in money matters, but there was more than room for doubt. Perhaps—so Mr. Lumby thought—his own laxness might have tempted the man, and being such a man as he now knew him to be, the chances of his fall from honesty seemed great. It still lacked an hour of midnight when Mr. Lumby rang the bell.

"I shall be out late," he said to the waiter. "Let a fire be laid in my bedroom, so that I can light it on my return, and leave a small decanter of brandy there for me."

The waiter bowed; and Mr. Lumby, assuming his hat and great-coat, left the hotel and walked resolutely toward his offices. Once he stopped dead short in the street, and stood for half a minute. "Underhand?" he murmured, as if questioning himself. "I can not help it. I must

know. He walked on again sturdily, and reached his goal. He tried his key upon the door. The latch turned easily; but the door was bolted and barred within. He rang the bell; and after a long pause he heard the sound of footsteps.

"Who's there?" asked the voice of the watchman who slept upon the premises. A little trap-door was pushed open, and the voice added: "Let me have a look at you." The light of a bull's-eye lantern fell through the space left by the trap-door full upon Mr. Lumby's face; and in a changed tone the watchman cried: "Wait one minute, sir. I beg your pardon." Lock and bolt went creaking back, and the door opened. "I never dreamt as it was you, sir," said the man.

"Lock the door again, and light me upstairs," returned the head of the firm.

The man obeyed, and in the little blot of light which dwelt about his feet, Mr. Lumby marched stolidly on through the darkness. "Light the gas." The man obeyed again. "I shall be here for some hours, perhaps all night. I have important business to do. I may be here to-morrow night, and perhaps again on Wednesday; but my being here is not to be spoken of. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir," the man responded.

"Very good. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir;" and the man was gone, his footsteps sounding lonely on corridor and staircase.

"Now, Garling," muttered Mr. Lumby, as he closed and locked the door, "let us see if you play fair." He pushed aside the sliding-panel of corrugated glass between the cashier's room and his own, and entered. On one side of this apartment, raised but one inch from the floor, stood a row of enormous ledgers, dating back many years. A broad-shouldered solid phalanx, they stood so tightly wedged together that it seemed if they had been each a leaf thicker, it would have been impossible to squeeze them into the place they occupied. Each bore upon its back in gilt figures the date of the year whose entries it held, the gilding being very dull and faded in the earliest volume, and mounting by slow stages through succeeding volumes to the fresh glitter of last year. Mr. Lumby seized that which dealt with the first year of Garling's stewardship

and dragged it from its place. It cost some effort to do this, and before he had laid the ponderous volume on the table in his own room, his brow was moist. He took off his hat and overcoat, wiped his forehead, and sat down with the book before him. Then casting the great boards open, he sat awhile with knitted brows thinking. Looking through the space where the sliding-panel had been, his eyes lighted upon a slender volume standing upon a shelf above the others, and rising, he crossed the room and returned with it. From the pages of the great ledger distilled a musty fungous odor like the smell of a long-closed vault, or the earthy scent of damp rot in a deserted chamber. There was something depressing in this odor; but he shook the feeling away, and set resolutely to work. He had wielded in his own hand the destinies of the great House, and in his day he had been a giant among accountants. The faculty was somewhat rusty with long disuse, as even the finest faculties are apt to grow, and he found himself at first less swift and certain than of old. But, as he labored, he felt the power growing anew within him; and in an hour's time he was sweeping over the serried columns at a pace which to most men would have made accuracy impossible. The night sped by; and he still sat there with knitted brows, pouring over the leaves. The dawn was gray, and the gas-light had grown sickly, when he laid a finger with a sudden gesture as of detection, upon one set of figures at the bottom of a page. His face had been growing more and more anxious for an hour, and now it was keen and hard on a sudden, as though triumph for the moment outweighed the sense of fear.

"Clumsy, after all," he muttered—"clumsy after all. The old plan. Juggling cross-entries to and fro, as though *that* could fog anybody but a fool." Looking up he saw how light the air had grown; and consulting his watch, he found that it had run down at a few minutes after six o'clock. "It may be half past seven by now," he said, under his breath. "I must be away at once." By instinct, he moved silently, in the silent house; and having thrust the great ledger back again into its place, and laid down the slender volume exactly as he found it, he closed the panel, and looked about him to see if there were anything which bore an altered aspect. The gas brackets had not

been so drawn out when he came, and he replaced them. He unlocked the door, withdrew the key, locked it on the outer side, and in the dim light felt his way along the corridor and down the stairs. The watchman had opened the large doors, and was smoking a morning pipe outside. The streets were almost in clear daylight, dimly as the dawn had seemed to peep through the office windows.

"Good-morning, sir," said the watchman, touching his hat.

"Good-morning," returned Mr. Lumby; and pausing, laid a warning finger on the watchman's breast: "Not a word of my having been here—to anybody. I shall be down again to-night at nine."

"Very good, sir," answered the man respectfully; and his employer, walking sturdily, turned the corner and was gone from sight.

"Theer's somebody up to something," thought the watchman, as he resumed his pipe; "and the governor's a-finding of 'em out. That's evident. You've got a pretty tidy berth here, Joseph," apostrophizing himself, "and you know when you're well off, don't you? Very well, then, don't let us hear none o' *your* chin-music. Of all the disastrous things as is, onregulated chin-music is the wust. 'Not a word,' says the governor, 'not to nobody.' Very well, then, Joseph, 'not a word' it is!"

Mr. Lumby walked onward sturdily, bound for his hotel. There was a somewhat dazed and unreal sense upon him, in the first place, born probably of his having been up all night; and he was not yet nearly so much moved by his discovery as it seemed probable to himself that he would be if he made it. He had his doubts at first as to the meaning of the discovery. At the beginning of his day of trust, Garling had been deliberately false; but had the falsehood gone on? or was restitution made, and had he walked honestly since? That question remained still to be decided, but with so large a presumption on the wrong side of it as amounted almost to a moral certainty. What motive could the man have had? What reason in such a case to search for motives? Yet Garling had always, so far as his chief employer knew, lived plainly—more plainly than necessity demanded; and indeed passed as a saving man, with a tolerable balance at the bank. So much had

been said of him currently many years ago. Surely he was too long-headed and keen to gamble. Where could the temptation come from with such a man? In what quarter was he likely to be assailable? It was against Mr. Lumby's experience that a man at once saving by nature and prosperous by circumstances should become a swindler. It was not only against experience, but in the very teeth of reason. And now—how much was likely to be gone? and how much was likely to be recovered?

All this was futile guess-work for the present; but the business man's heart quaked at the bare thought that enough might be gone to shake the credit of the House. If that were so, he could never forgive himself. For it was he to whom the concerns of the House had been left by his father, and if they had been fatally betrayed, it was he who was to blame. Generation after generation of Lumbys, father and son for a hundred and thirty years, had carried on the House with ever-growing wealth and credit; and if, in his day, it should sink dishonorably, it would be more than he could bear. Now he began to wake to the possible dread of the discovery he had made. But he put it from him. No man could have conceived and carried on without detection a fraud so vast; and yet he had trusted Garling so implicitly that he had left him the power to gather everything into his own hands, if he had the will to do it, and, disappearing suddenly, to leave the concerns of the firm a shapeless wreck and ruin. Was Garling bold and vile enough for such a deed? Who knew? Was he able enough to do it, if he chose to be a villain? Of that Lumby had no doubt. And there grew up before him the vision of a systematic fraud so carefully planned and so thoroughly executed, that he quailed to think of it. But as this dread seemed to grow more and more possible to his mind, the old man's stout heart rose to meet it. Perhaps it was a petty matter, after all—a question of a few hundreds, or, at the utmost, a few thousands; but if it were the deep-laid scheme he feared, he would hoist the wicked engineer with his own petard. He hungered for the night to come, that he might be back unknown at the books again, to trace the swindle upward from its birth; and then, fully armed with knowledge, turn upon the man who had planned against his honor and betrayed his trust, and crush him with a word.

The entrance of Mr. Lumby to the hotel was noticed with befitting wonder by the Boots at the amazing hour of eight A.M. He had walked the streets for more than half an hour, to clear his brain, which was still in turmoil as he entered, and mounted to his bedroom. "It may take a week—a month—to go through the books and learn everything." So he mused. "Can I afford to wait so long? Will it not be safest to have him watched? or will he be so keen that a watch will set him off? Shall I take anybody into confidence, or track him by myself? Why, if I can do it alone, should I publish my own laxity? I don't want to be laughed at or pitied by business men in London. 'Poor old Lumby, smart man once, gone past his time.' No, no. None of that for me. The scoundrel, trusted as he has been! The fool I was to trust him! Trust no man, no man! The villain! I made him, made him! took him from the gutter almost, and made him a figure in the City —a man of mark. Black ingratitude. The heartless scoundrel! Come—what have I proved against him yet to be in such a fever? More than enough, more than enough. Oh, the scoundrel—to take him by the elbow when I know all; to take him lightly in a friendly way—'Garland, the favor of a friendly word with you.' I think I see him. 'Oblige me by looking at this paper—a calculation for the past nine years, showing the sums of which you have swindled the firm of Lumby and Lumby.' Is that worth doing? Is that worth waiting for and creeping to through nights of watching? Come, come! I may find that he has been honest since that first year; some pressure may have been upon him. Pressure! He knew well enough that in any extremity he might come to me."

He maddened himself thus, walking up and down his room for a long time, but by and by settled into a slow rage of hate and anger infinitely more deadly, and more terrible to endure. In this mood he sat down to think, and found thought beyond him. There was no room in his mind for anything but that slow rage, unless it were an undefined fear of what the rage might lead to; for he felt almost murderous, and some dread of his own passion began to take hold upon him. He had always thought himself a kindly and a merciful man, and in truth he had been so; but he had never had cause to hate or to be greatly angry until now. The two things that hurt him most

were his own imbecility of confidence in the man—for so he called it—and the fact that he himself had bred the creature who so stung him. He had bragged of Garling's finance, of Garling's keenness, of Garling's trustworthiness—he had promoted him from post to post; he—known as a sound man of business—had so belauded and so trusted Garling, that all men had accepted him. How could he blame himself bitterly enough? He raged up and down the room again. So, now in a whirlwind, and now in a sudden calm, and now back again into the whirlwind, his thoughts fought and wrestled. But one thing became abundantly clear to him. If he desired to survive this blow at all, and still more if he meant to repay it—and he did—he must be calm. And the first way to that was to make up a definite mind as to the course he should take. There was no fear—except a certain phantom fear that would intrude itself however often banished—that Garling could as yet have taken fright. There was little likelihood of his learning of his employer's nightly visits to the office, and no reason, therefore, for him to think himself suspected. It would be best on all grounds—if it could be safely done—to learn everything before bringing his charge; and after much doubtful examination, he decided to wait, and by nightly studies of the books, to learn all that could be learned. But an impulse, which seemed merely accidental, threw his resolve to pieces.

He took a bath, and tried to breakfast; and after a time, returning to his bedroom, carefully darkened the room and lay down to sleep. For some hours sleep seemed unlikely enough, and he did nothing but fight over all the old ground again, passing through new rages and new revengeful pauses of rage; but at length quite suddenly, as he lay with closed eyes he fell into a doze, and thence, after some uneasy tossings, into a deep if troubled slumber. When he awoke, the brief spring day was already fading into dusk. He arose refreshed; and his thoughts instantly recurring to the business before him, he felt a sort of hunger and hurry to begin it, and waited with much impatience for the hour of nine. It was half because he had named that time to the watchman, that he chose it now; for he was in a mood to be guided by hints of superstition and beginnings of foreboding; but there was solid reason for not going earlier, since on uncertain and irregular occa-

sions, the whole staff of clerks stayed late, and it was essential to his purpose to be secret.

The night was raw, and as desolate as only night in a great city can be. There was a filthy mist abroad, bedraggling the lamps and the illuminated windows; and the pavement was slimy to the feet, as though the mist had been beaten and trodden down by the traffic into that consistency. At fretful, unavailing war with the mist, there was a miserable wind, maudlin, and moaning its own discomfort, shivering and whimpering in such a fashion as to become trying to the human temper and provoke impatience at its feebleness. Even the most inveterate loungers were within doors to-night, and only misery and business were abroad. Mr. Lumby walked on stoutly, until, without apparent reason, he came to a sudden halt, and stood staring thoughtfully at the greasy pavement. So far as he could have told, then, or afterward, there was absolutely nothing in his mind to determine him. He had thought the whole matter over, and had decided on his course. And yet in the pause he made, he changed his resolution, and turning to the right, swung straight toward Garling's chambers. Reaching Fleet Street, he began to examine the numbers of the houses, and went peering through mist and night from door to door. He knew Garling's number, but had forgotten the look of the house, if ever he had known it. As he went on peering from door to door, a cabman, a dozen yards in front of him, came stumbling across the pavement with a canvas-covered box. He placed this on the top of his cab and stood by the door. A girl, closely wrapped against the mist and cold, tripped over the pavement and entered the vehicle. Following her came a man, muffled to the chin, and carrying a satchel of black leather. Crawling slowly along the same side of the street came a hansom cab, and Mr. Lumby, with bent head and a feigned lameness in his gait, stumped swiftly to it and stayed the driver with a motion of his hand. The hansom pulled up three yards behind the four-wheeler.

"Where to, sir?" asked the foremost driver.

"Waterloo station, main line," said Garling's voice in answer.

Lumby standing, and facing the driver of the other cab, waved to him to be still. "Follow," whispered the merchant across the top of the cab. The cabman nodded, and

drove slowly in Garling's rear. "Is this the flight?" asked Lumby of himself—"Is this the flight?"

CHAPTER XIX.

REGINALD, IN HIS FRIENDSHIP FOR VAL STRANGE, BEGAN TO GROW DESPERATELY FEARFUL FOR HIM.

Mr. Reginald Jolly and his father walked together in Piccadilly. Even Captain Morris, the sometime laureate of the West End, would have found but little in his favorite haunt to praise on such a morning. Mud and mist were its prevailing characteristics; the mud oceanic, the mist Scottish, and the general outlook profoundly melancholy. London is the home of wonders, and among its store of marvels it is open to question whether there be one greater than the placid endurance of its people. In Stamboul—which is the incapable official's earthly paradise—men bear anything. But in London, capital city of the land of the free, it is singular that we make no rebellion against misrule. There was an Irishman once, who, being informed that for a score of years the bailiff or land-steward in a certain district had not been shot at, excused his countrymen on the ground that what was everybody's business was nobody's business. Perhaps the same proverb applies in other cases; and anyhow, Piccadilly lay in its usual spring-tide condition.

In all minds, good temper is not merely synchronous with boot-polish; but there are circumstances and conditions in which the one may disappear with the loss of the other. Mr. Jolly, in spite of the weather, had turned out of his chambers in the Albany in a beaming condition. A passing hansom rolled up a sudden wave of mud; the wave overflowed Mr. Jolly's varnished shoes and spotless gaiters; the cabman turned and grinned derisively; a small boy, with that inhuman delight in misery which only small boys feel, danced with joy on the muddy pavement at the sight; and the injured gentleman, forgetting dignity in anger, made at the juvenile satirist with his cane. But the small boy, surrounding himself with a very halo of mud-splashes, danced behind a lamp-post, and from that place of vantage hurled forth satires too ponderous—so it seemed—for in-

fant tongue to wield; and Mr. Jolly could but shake his stick at him in impotent exasperation. Turning, in anger curiously disproportionate to the event, such as elderly gentlemen are subject to on like occasions, the injured man faced his only son, and read on his undutiful countenance a smile of mirth. At that, with such reproach in his glance as may have stricken Brutus when dying Cæsar breathed "*et tu*," he walked in silence to a near cab-stand, and entering the first vehicle he came to, gave the word for home. When Reginald would have entered with him, the aggrieved father voicelessly waved him back and drove away alone. The aged-seeming youth stood upon the curb-stone and watched the retreating cab. His smile was half-glad, half-pensive, and he gave the small boy a penny. Then obscuring the remnant of his emotion with an eye-glass, behind which all passions faded to a stony glare, he turned away, and felt a hand upon his shoulder.

"Hillo! How de do?" from Reginald.

"How de do?" from Mr. Gilbert, late yachting comrade of Val Strange's. "Nice day. Your governor, wasn't it, who drove away just now? Thought so. Which way are you going?"

"I am a waif upon the human sea," responded Reginald, winking behind his eye-glass with much dexterity. "I *was* going somewhere; but my guide has left me, and I am alone in London, and I don't know where to go."

"Come and lunch with a fellow at the Club—just across the road."

"What fellow am I to lunch with?" inquired Reginald.

"Come on," returned Gilbert, and led the way to a ford, or crossing, by means of which they passed over the river of mud and came to the Club portals.

"Thus," said Reginald later on, waving his hands vaguely at the well-furnished table, the cheerful apartment, and the fire, "thus we pluck sweetness from misfortune, and the grief of the father becomes gladness to the son." Gilbert, who had seen the disaster to the elder Jolly, smiled, and pushed the claret across the table. "Strange is in town, I believe," said Reginald, a moment later. "Have you seen him?"

"No," said Gilbert, a slow smile again wreathing itself about his broad features. "Strange and I are at loggerheads." When Gilbert smiled, there was this peculiarity

about it, that the smile worked underground, so to speak, traveling unseen about his countenance, breaking out at salient points, to disappear again and break out again, now in a wreathing of the lips, now in a twinkle of the eye, until having permeated the whole mass of his mid-England features, it burst forth all over in a kind of triumph.

"At loggerheads?" said Reginald, fixing his eye-glass in order to reproach him. "Why, I thought you two were the Damon and Pythias of the modern world. And who ever heard of anybody quarreling with Val Strange?"

"I never quarreled with him," said Gilbert, with his smile in ambush in his eyes. "I never row with anybody. Not on principle, because I think a fellow ought to assert himself at times; but because I haven't energy. The fact is, he quarreled with me."

"What about?" inquired the other.

I think I have the letter about me somewhere," said Gilbert, pulling out some loose papers. "Yes; here it is."

Reginald took the letter from his outstretched hand. "Am I to read this?"

Gilbert nodded; and his companion, taking down his eyeglass, opened the letter, and read a line or two: "I am in the dullest hole I ever got into my life;" and so forth. At this he turned his eyes to the address from which the writer dated, and saw that this epistle had been forwarded from his father's house. He gave a little gasp at that discovery, and partly to cover a momentary confusion, read on. When he had read it through, he handed it back to Gilbert. "Did you send the telegram?" he inquired innocently.

Gilbert's slow smile declared itself on his lips, disappeared, shone out in his eyes, disappeared, and beamed suddenly on every feature. He nodded twice or thrice, and responded, in the phrase of the once-famous Muster Gerridge: "I believe you, my boy. I sent it. I did more. I went out of my way to oblige him. You see, he asked me not to fail in making the telegram urgent enough to fetch him out of the place he'd got into; and so, thinking the first mightn't seem sufficiently particular I sent a second; and then—so that there shouldn't be any mistake about it—I sent another. Then he comes up to town, slangs me horribly for overdoing it, and tells me he's done with me forever. It's Talleyrand over again.

Trop de zèle. You catch me ever helping anybody again, and tell me of it."

"You don't happen to know whom Strange was staying with, do you?" asked Reginald.

"No," said Gilbert. "He omitted to name his host, and I don't know anybody but Val himself in that part of the country." And Mr. Gilbert, had he known the truth, would rather have been shot than have betrayed Strange in this manner. "Why do you ask? Do you know 'em?"

"Ye-es!" said Reginald, again, assuming his eyeglass, and speaking in a tone of anything but certainty. "I *think* I do."

"They must be a wooden lot," said Gilbert, "to frighten Strange in that way. In a matter of patient endurance of boredom, I'm a perfect camel, and Val is the next man to me. I never knew anybody who could endure being bored better than Val, except myself of course. But then, you know," said Gilbert, as if depreciating his own virtues, "I am so used to it. I can't remember not being bored; everything's a bore to me, and always was, and so, you see, I've had lots of practice."

"Ye-es," said Reginald, again. "Must have had." He was both humiliated and indignant; but by dint of much self-control, he disguised his feelings, and turning the conversation to other mntters, sat on for an hour, and then took leave. He was eager to be alone, that he might puzzle out this curious affair of Strange's. If it were true that Val had found things dull at the Grange, it was certain that he had borne the infliction in a marvelously cheerful manner on the whole. Dull? He had been the life of the house—the very center of all people's enjoyment. Once or twice there might have been a preoccupied and even a dreary look upon his face—Reginald remembered that—but he had always emerged from his momentary quiet into a very fever of good spirits. There was some small mystery at the bottom of the matter, and the younger Jolly was one of those people to whom mystery is a thing unendurable. There was a fair share of mother-wit hidden in that prematurely bald head of his, and as he sat in deep bepuzzlement over the whole matter, some uncertain gleams of light began to dawn. It was evident that Strange must have been intensely eager to get away, before he would have written such a letter to Gilbert. It was

equally evident that the reason he gave was not the true one. It was plain, also, that when the telegram arrived which should have been his excuse for leaving, he had changed his mind, and did not want to go. The complete pretense of the excuse was proved by his immediate return when at last the third telegram had forced him away. This, then, was clear—that, at the Grange, at the time of Val's stay, there was some unusual attraction and some equally unusual repulsion. Reginald cudgeled his brains to remember whether anybody who might have been disagreeable to Strange had left the house between the writing of the letter and the receipt of the telegram. No. There was nobody leaving at that time. Had anybody arrived who brought a new attraction to the place, and made him eager to return? No. Then the attraction and the repulsion existed there together. How?

When the present writer was very young indeed, he was in love, in a quite hopeless manner, with a lady whose years probably doubled his own. The lady was perhaps two-and-twenty, and is at this time elderly and indeed a grandmother. The present writer was permitted to make one of a water-party, and to his own ecstatic delight, was relegated to the boat in which the object of his unspoken adoration sat with a younger sister. It was a large boat; and there were several young men who wore high collars, and otherwise made open proclamation of achieved manhood, told off to it; but there were no other ladies. One of the young men had the celestial happiness to be the brother of my adored. Unmindful of that splendid privilege, he called to the occupants of another boat, complaining of the inequality of distribution. My hated rival, who was two-and-thirty, turned upon him: "It's all right, Tom. We have your sisters. Don't ask any more ladies here!" "Don't ask any more?" queried the other. "Sisters!" It was spoken with extreme disdain. "What do you think a fellow wants with his sisters at a picnic?" This was my first lesson in a phase of nature which I have since studied with some care. It impressed me all the more because it was uttered in respect to *such* a sister; and the moral I deduce from it and from my after-studies is this: that, as a rule, a brother is ignorant—is even ridiculously ignorant—of his sister's fascinations for other people. He is prepared to admit the attractions of other men's sisters—*they* appeal to him: he is

not altogether amazed—though perhaps amused—that a man should marry or desire to marry *his* sister; but if the future brother-in-law, in a flush of that foolish fever under which he labors, should chance to pour out his thoughts of his divinity, it seems—confess it—a little ridiculous to the divinity's brother. Those lambent orbs in which the soul is made visible for the first and last time in this world for you or me—"item," saith the brother, "a gray eye or so." Her sigh melts not him, her glance commands him not, he will grin superior at your raptures; had it been Susan, now, —*your* sister—he could have understood it.

Any other man knowing all that Reginald knew, and having but half his readiness of observation, would have jumped to the truth at once. It may be accepted as proof of considerable keenness that he reached the truth at all. It was a slow and doubtful process; but he mastered the problem at length, and was satisfied that his solution was the true one. It troubled him on many grounds. He had grown into a great liking for Gerard, and had long had the sincerest friendship for Strange. And he himself was proud, and in respect to some matters, loftily honorable. The British undergraduate has, if you take him in the lump, fewer of the Christian virtues than you might wish to find in him; but some of the mere heathen virtues are an absolute part of him, and men who have them not, he despises, and from his soul abhors. Reginald, in his friendship for Val Strange, began to grow desperately fearful for him. It was remarkable, having once made up his mind to the reason of Val's astonishing behavior in the matter of the telegrams, how true an allowance of the impulses which guided all three of the people involved, he was able to make. He adjudged to Gerard at once the unsuspicious single-heartedness which belonged to him; to Constance, the honor which baffled inclination; and to Strange, the weakness which made his passion so dangerously strong. He resolved to watch, even to make opportunities for watching; and if the result should confirm his thoughts, to speak.

CHAPTER XX.

"VALENTINE STRANGE, I WANT TO SPEAK TO YOU."

CONSTANCE was staying with Mr. Jolly's maiden sister, who lived in a small house, at a large rental, in Chesterfield Street, Mayfair; and thither Reginald drove before dinner that evening, resolved on what should seem a call of duty on the maiden aunt. To his profound amazement he found Strange there, settled apparently as a friend of the household. He glared at him with unveiled surprise, and Val himself looked almost as guilty as he felt. "Why, what," cried the startled new-comer, "in the name of all the wonders, brings you here?"

"Reginald!" said the maiden aunt, with some severity.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear," said Reginald, in response. "Strange and I are old friends." He kissed the withered cheek dutifully, as he had always done, and nodded at Constance. He was himself again.

"How's papa?" inquired Constance.

"Drowned, drowned, drowned, as the Queen in 'Hamlet' says," returned the flippant young man; and proceeded to relate the little episode of the morning. His eyes wandered from Strange to Constance, and from Constance to Strange, and he watched and speculated as he chattered. The mere insertion of his eyeglass seemed to lend him a certain sublime stoniness of visage. He watched everything in seeming to watch nothing; and, being a born diplomatist, he abstracted himself gradually from Strange and Constance, and gave himself wholly over to the amusement of the old lady. But, for whatever reason, the two made no sign, and seemed, indeed, even a little bored with each other, and aweary of the world. Reginald, confident in the freedom he could take, determined to sit out the term of Val's visit, and having accomplished that feat, and driven Strange into rising, he also arose.

"We'll go together," he said, quietly.

Val, being unable to find a reason for sitting down again, abused himself inwardly for not having exercised another minute's patience; not guessing that, in that cause, Reginald would have willingly sat there for a week. Un-

impressible, and even stupid as he contrived to look behind his glass, the little man noted everything. In Strange's farewell to Constance there was something of an appeal, a touch so fine, that the best of actors would have been put to it to copy the manner of it. Constance's manner was chilly; but her bosom gave one long heave, and she paled and trembled ever so little as she said good-bye and gave him her hand. These signs were so delicate in themselves, that I have in expressing them a sort of feeling that I exaggerate them; but the keen, though vacuous-looking eye behind the eyeglass took in all, and the youth made his own conclusions.

"Valentine Strange," he said, pausing in the street a few seconds later, and tapping his friend lightly on the breast, "I want to speak to you."

Val looked at him quietly. "What is it?"

"Come with me to your own rooms," said Reginald. "We can be quiet there."

Val, with a little sinking at the heart, foreboding what was coming, nodded in assent; and having summoned a hansom, they were trundled along with scarcely a word between them.

"Now," said Strange, turning upon him when his rooms were reached, "what is it?" The air was dusky, but there was a fire aglow upon the hearth by which the two could read each other's faces.

"Got any 'baccy?" asked the younger. "Thank you." He chose a pipe from the rack above the mantel-piece, and having filled and lit it, sat down gravely and smoked, with both hands stretched out to the red gleam of the fire.

"What is it?" Strange asked again, this time with some impatience.

"You remember kicking Davis in the Fives Court?" asked Reginald, with apparent irrelevance.

"Yes," said Strange, breathing tightly, and not knowing what to make of this beginning. "What about it?"

"Remember the fight that came after it?"

"Perfectly," said Val, trying to laugh, and not succeeding very brilliantly.

"Remember what it was all about?"

"Certainly. What of it?"

"You did me a royal good turn that day," said Reginald. "It's twelve years ago, ain't it? We've been close chums

ever since that time, haven't we, Val? And that was the beginning of it. Very well. You've always been stronger and richer and luckier and handsomer than me, haven't you? Very well, again."

"You have not been drinking, have you?" asked Strange.

"Half a pint of claret at luncheon," said the little man, with his eyes on the red glow of the fire. "We've been chums for twelve years. You began by licking an enemy of mine, and you've gone on with all manner of kindnesses ever since. And now I'm going to show my gratitude. You're not the Valentine Strange you used to be. There's something on your mind. Will you tell me what it is, Val, or shall *I* tell *you?*" Strange sat in silence. "Remember, Val," said his companion, lifting his gaze from the fire, and looking full in Val's eyes across the semi-darkness of the place, "this is the first chance of doing you a turn I've had. I give you notice that I'm going to take it—mercilessly."

"That half-pint," said Val, "was longer or stronger than common. Have a nap."

"Am I to tell you what it is?" asked Reginald, with no alteration in his tone, and with his eyes still fixed on his companion; "or will you tell me?"

"Oh!" cried Val, in a tone of easy impatience and derision, "let us have it. Let me get a light. And now, go ahead. I'm waiting." He threw both legs over the arm of his chair, and slipped back, so that his face fell into darkness.

In answer to this movement, the little man arose and lit the gas before he spoke another word.

Strange came uneasily back into his former posture. "Confound your mystery!" he cried. "What have you to say?"

"I have something to say," returned the other, "that I don't want to say. Something I tremendously dislike to say. Something I must say, unless you'll say it for me." Strange's only answer was to cast his hands resignedly abroad. Reginald stood upon the hearth-rug before him, and had the advantage, unusual with him, of looking at Strange from a superior height. It is remarkable how that tells in a discussion—with some people. "Now, will you tell me, Val—you, an honorable man—will you tell me on

your word of honor that you have no guess of what I mean?"

"You little lunatic," said Strange, with an affectation of good-humored raillery, "how *should* I tell?"

"Val," said the little man feelingly, "you don't know how much I know." At last, Strange started and turned pale. Was it possible that Constance, dreading herself, had besought her brother's interference? "Suppose," the little man continued, "that I had met your friend Gilbert —East?" He threw just a trifle of malice into the pause, for he was angry with Strange for that deception. Strange moved again, and blushed. This was turning the attack altogether, and though the shaft hit him smartly, he could bear it. If the letter to Gilbert were all the mystery, he thought he could make his peace. "Suppose," Reginald went on, "that I had put two and two together, with a result confirmed again this afternoon? Val, for pity's sake, don't make me fool about in this way any longer. Tell me you understand me."

"Well," said Val suddenly, with a desperate voice, and a face of pallor, "I understand you. Go on."

"Thank you," said the accuser, holding out his hand. Strange took it and pressed it hard, though he hung his head. "That's like you, Val, that's honest. I'm very sorry, very sorry, sorrier than I can say. But you're too late, Val. And you're a man of honor, and I'm a man of honor. And —*he's* a friend of yours, too, Val. Now, it's all over, isn't it?"

"Rags, old man," groaned Val, still holding his hand, and speaking with his head still bent, "she doesn't care for him—not a straw."

The little man gripped Val's hand harder as he responded: "We're both men of honor, and we're friends, Val—friends. We can't have her talked about. The other man's in his right. She took him with her eyes open, and you came too late. You came in last. Well, you'll find another race that'll be better worth winning in." There was no answer to this, except a groan and a harder grip of the hand. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," said Reginald; "but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Run away from it. That's the best thing you can do. Make a bolt—at once."

"Yes," said Val, stricken to the heart, "I'll go. But,"

he added, lifting his head, and showing a face so changed, that his companion was amazed and half frightened by it, "it will be as hard for—" He checked himself there, but the tone told all.

"The more need to go, if that's the case," said Reginald, hardening himself. "Honor! Val, honor!"

"I know it will be," cried Val, rising and casting his arms upon the mantel-piece. He looked around with haggard eyes. "I know it!" he cried again, and dropped his head upon his arms.

"How do you know it?" asked the other, almost sternly. Val! you haven't—spoken to her?"

"What do you think of me?" cried the miserable Val, not daring to confess. "But I know it."

"I've never been hit in this way," said the young philosopher, laying a friendly hand on Strange's shoulder; "but I suppose I shall take pot-luck with the others when the time comes. And if men and books speak the truth, the only courage is to run away, in such a case as this. Start at once. Go to Naples."

"I am sick of Naples," said Val, raising his head drearily. "But I'll get away somewhere, and I'll catch the tidal train of to-night. Will you—will you say I'm gone?"

"Yes," answered Reginald, moved by his friend's trouble. "And, Strange, look here! Stop away till it's all over. There's a good fellow. We shall have you back as jolly as a sand-boy in a few months' time. And I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll go to Bassano's and have a room to ourselves, and dine together, and I'll see you off."

"Do you want to watch me?" asked Val, bitterly.

"That's not like you," said the little man, reaching up and putting a hand on each of his friend's shoulders. "I want to cheer you a bit."

Strange rang his bell, and ordered his servant to pack for the Continent, and book for Southampton. "I'll go there to-night, and start for somewhere," he said, recklessly. "Come on. Let's to dinner." He rattled away in an almost hysterical fashion until the time for parting came. But when Reginald had shaken hands with him, as the train moved from the platform, and had withdrawn his hand, he felt that there were tears upon it.

CHAPTER XXI.

"MY DEAR, I HAVE HAD A TALK WITH YOUR FATHER."

"AND so," said Garling, as he and Hiram walked together, "you have the whip-hand of me?"

"That," said Hiram, with great gravity, "is so."

"I am not accustomed to harness," observed Garling, with his own grim smile, "and you will make little progress by driving me too hard. Before we go further, I have something to say. Shall we talk here? We can have quiet." He pointed to a court upon the left hand; and without waiting for an answer, led the way, passing through a low-browed door with a sunken step, along a saw-dusted passage, and into a room the atmosphere of which was dense with stale tobacco-smoke. Seating himself at a battered and discolored little circular table, he motioned Hiram to follow his example. By this time, Garling was as cool and self-possessed as ever, and his manner was simply business-like. "And now, Mr. Search —that is your name, I believe—before you drive me further, I must have a little talk with you."

"Well," returned Hiram, "there's biblical precedent. Dare say you remember Balaam. Go ahead, sir."

"You are in good spirits," said Garling quite agreeably. "That is natural. But the best players are those whose spirits neither mount with gains nor fall at losses. Forgive me if I seem to lecture you; but since we are to hold relationship so close as that of father and son, I can scarcely fail to feel a little proprietary right in you." The smile with which Garling accompanied these words was such a compound of craft and mirth and malice as Hiram had never seen before. The younger man nodded with an answering smile, and for half a minute the two sat thus looking at each other, the cashier smiling—as Hiram said long afterward in telling the story—"like an octopus," and the other beaming back at him. "This is quite an agreeable meeting," said Garling, darkening suddenly. He went on abruptly: "You have an object to achieve, and so have I. It is in your power to put me to much inconvenience—inconvenience to which I would not voluntarily submit—I

am quite candid, you observe—for a thousand pounds. But on the other hand it is in my power to inflict upon you, by submitting to that inconvenience, a disappointment which would, I presume, be considerable. You admit that?"

"Yes," returned Hiram; "I admit that." A waiter with weak eyes, disorganized hair, and a dissipated-looking suit of evening clothes, here entered. The waiter's garb had the look—common to dress-clothes worn in the day-time—of having been up all night; but the waiter himself had a contradictory appearance of having only just got out of bed.

"Did you ring, gentlemen," inquired the waiter forlornly.

"We did not," said Garling, resuming his smile. "I suppose we ought to have done so. May I offer you any little refreshment, son-in-law? A little brandy? A glass of wine? No, I will take a little brandy, waiter, pale and cold."

"Bring me a cigar," said Hiram; and the waiter made his exit, like a troubled ghost, who found it a relief to be laid. "I admit that," said Hiram again, nodding across the table, as a hint to Garling to go on.

"Now I am naturally a stuborn man, Mr. Search," said the cashier, resuming, and I have a great dislike to being driven. You observe that I am candid with you. If I should find myself being driven too hard, I should probably kick over the traces. Now, that would be quite a melancholy thing for both of us. You would fulfill your threat; I should put my power into action; we should each be injured irreparably, and at daggers-drawn for the rest of our lives."

"It is a theme," said Hiram, "for one of the gentlemen who paint your coats of arms. Balaam right, quadruped left, and each with a drawn dagger." He said this musingly, eying Garling meanwhile with pleased contentment.

"You are pleased to be facetious," said the cashier, looking at him from under beetling brows, but smiling still. So, in prize-ring matters, the Putney Chicken and Hammersmith Pet were wont to smile on each other, each with wicked patience waiting for his chance to plant a blow.

The waiter came in at this juncture, ghost-like, and being again laid by the magic of a half-crown, fluttered off again, and once more made an appearance, and having, like the ghosts in legendary stories, surrendered treasure, vanished finally. "You see, Mr. Search," said Garling, sipping at his brandy-and-water, "that it will be unwise to drive too hard?"

"I am not particular about the pace," said Hiram, biting off the end of his cigar, and looking complacently at his companion, "but I am bent on going all the way. But, come now, mister. We can get along without being so lovely figurative, I reckon. Move on, and say straight out what you want."

"I will admit you," said Garling, "to visit my daughter at any reasonable hours at which she cares to see you. If her mind is set upon it, I shall throw no obstacle in the way of your union."

"That's very good of you," said Hiram dryly.

"Not at all," returned Garling, with superior dryness. "So far, I am driven. At present, Mr. Search, my daughter informs me—for I need no longer disguise from you the fact that I have talked with her upon this topic—that your occupation is that of a 'bus conductor. Permit me to indicate that I shall take a good deal of driving before I consent to allow my only child to marry a man who occupies such a position. Understand, sir. I am to some extent in your power. To a certain extent—understand me clearly—you can force me. Beyond that line I will not go. You shall have free access to my daughter's society at reasonable times and in my presence. I shall place no impediment in the way of your ultimate union. But before that can come about, your social position must be much improved. If you accede to my terms, I shall not be unwilling to assist you in the effort to improve it. I do not think you can care to demand more than this at present; and I warn you that I will not yield a point beyond." There he paused, sipped his brandy and water with a keen and secret glance at Hiram's face, and throwing one leg across the other, awaited a reply.

Hiram for his part pulled placidly at his cigar, and turned things over in his mind a little before he answered. "Good," he said at length—"good, in all respects bar one. We air so amiable and loving-tempered both of us, that

you don't mind my being candid. Two is company—three ain't."

"When you have tried my plan," said Garling, "your power will be no less than it is now. Be content with what you have. Let me have the satisfaction of knowing that I retire gracefully."

"Cupid," said Hiram, looking at him musingly, "is really not a part that you'd look pretty in. No, sir; it is not a character to suit your style."

Garling accepted this uncomplimentary statement without any change of countenance or sign of displeasure. "Let me have a day or two in which to think the matter over, Mr. Search." That was all he said. There was no denying that he took defeat pluckily, and Hiram began to admire his courage and endurance.

"Mister," he returned, "I have trapped a good many critters of different sorts in various regions; but I never trapped a man afore. Most of the critters raved a good deal, and took it wild; some of 'em took it sulky. Now, you take it like a man, and I esteem you for it—I do. And I shall meet you fair, in consekence. *Pro tempore*, as we say in the Classics, the arrangement you suggest will fit the present-speaking Christian, easy. I've got my turn to serve; but I don't care about doin' more than serve it, and so I'll close with this remark—I sha'n't ride rusty so long as you go easy. But try to slip, try one dodge, and I am down, sir, like a fifty-ton steam Nasmith hammer on an unprotected bull-frog. Now you know."

"Having arrived at that pleasant mutual understanding," said the cashier, calmly, "we may part for the present, I presume."

"Not yet," returned Hiram. "We'll go a piece up Fleet Street, if you please."

The cashier, assenting with a shrug of the shoulders, arose and left the room, and Hiram followed. In this order they traversed Ludgate Hill and Fleet Street, the cashier going foremost, with bent head and hands folded behind him, looking unconscious of the figure in his rear; and Hiram, with his head in the air, sucking smilingly at his cigar, coming on at an easy saunter, as though he had never seen Garling in his life before. Drawing near his own residence, the leader produced his keys, and having unlocked the door, admitted his companion. "I forgot to

mention one thing, Mr. Search," he said, as they stood together at the foot of the stairs. "My daughter must necessarily know the arrangement we have come to; but she must not know why we have arrived at it. Any hint on your part that you have any control over me will dissolve our bargain, and I will take the consequences. You understand me?"

"Yes."

"And you agree?"

"Certainly."

"You will respect all my private affairs so far as she is concerned?"

"I will," said Hiram simply.

The cashier moved on again, and selecting a new key, unlocked the door at the head of the stairs. As he did so a smile, against which he had fought his hardest for the last five minutes, broke out in his eyes and wreathed his features—a smile so cunning, so triumphant and diabolical, that if his companion had seen it he would surely have found a warning in it. He did not see it; but as Garling feigned to fumble at the lock, in order to make time to smooth his face, Hiram laid a hand upon his shoulder. "Here's another part of the bargain," he said severely—"I won't have her kept a prisoner."

"There is no longer any need," answered Garling, throwing open the door. His face was calm again, but there was still a light of triumph in his eyes which made him fear to show them. As he lifted his face momentarily on entering the room, his daughter saw upon it that new look, and for a moment wondered. But she had little time or inclination to question it; for there—wonder of wonders—at this cruel father's heels came Hiram, her hero, her lover, her man of men! Was the cruel father a good father, after all? She took one hurried step toward her lover, and her pale cheek flushed and her bosom heaved. Then she stood still, with her hands a little stretched toward him; and Hiram, coming boldly in, took her in his arms and kissed her, and laid her poor pale little face against his waistcoat, whilst she cried for joy. Beholding this, Garling walked to the window, as if he would not willingly be too much in the way. O Hiram, traveled citizen, cutest of omnibus-conductors, cool and cunning and brave, you will have need of cunning and of swiftness to

overreach the owner of the crafty eyes that look out on Fleet Street, whilst you pet your innocent treasure and make much of her! Be wary, Hiram! And you too, Garling, swift of mental fence, triumphing—be you wary, lest, in an hour you know not, the solid way before you shake and yawn and ingulf you. Crime-built castles are unsteadfast, Garling. Beware your ears, should the flawless walls come down at a run, as walls so built are like to do. No; Garling has no fears.

Mary, withdrawing herself shyly from Hiram's arms, looked from one to another of this curiously assorted pair, her father and her sweetheart, in a palpitating, happy, yet half-fearful wonder; Garling still looking out of the window, hiding his smile. Hiram answered her glances, and said: "My dear, I have had a talk with your father. He is willing to allow me to wait on you, and he promises not to throw anything between us—"

"It is out of the question," broke in Garling, smoothly, speaking with his face turned to the window, "that Mr. Search should dream of marriage, whilst occupying his present position. I shall find something for him to do, however, I dare say, and in that I may perhaps have to rely upon your assistance, Mary." The smile flashed out again exultant as he said this; but by a great effort, he suppressed it, and turned upon them both his ordinary face of down-looking secrecy. "In the meantime, it is enough to say that I withdraw my opposition to Mr. Search, and that I leave you and him to settle matters between you. With this understanding—that nothing shall be hidden, but all clear, honorable, and above-board." He looked a singular advocate for openness of conduct, as he stood there with his furtive hands behind him, and his secret eyes in ambush beneath his beetling brows; but Mary had no suspicion of him; and Hiram, though he thought he knew his man pretty fairly, held him in his power, and could always shake his knowledge over him. In a little while Garling drew out his watch, and remarking that he had business to attend to, arose, with a meaning look toward Hiram, who, not being anxious to disturb the seeming concord or to assert his power too soon, rose also, and after a tender farewell, departed with his host.

"You will write to me?" Mary whispered, following to the door.

"Yes, my darling—yes," said Hiram, and was gone. The girl stayed behind happy, and Hiram walked away, happy at the new condition of affairs.

Garling went *his* way, triumphant. "Had this happened six months ago, it might have cost some trouble," he thought as he went along with his head bent and his hands clasped behind him. "Had it happened a month back, it might have inclined me to hurry. But happening now, when everything is ready, it comes as a little welcome excitement, and keeps one from thinking too much of other matters. And you have the whip-hand over me, have you, Mr. Search? It was not worth while to give the fellow into custody; the affair might have got into the papers a day or too soon. As it is, I have had my sport and gained my point into the bargain. *Did* you never trap a man before this, my astute American friend? Look at your trap next week. I played him well," he thought, smilingly. "It was high-comedy. I take some credit for the gravity of my yielding, the solemn bargaining of the capitulation. I declare, Garling," he told himself in secret exultation, "you have a sense of humor even yet. And that ignoramus thought to harness *me?* Tcha!" he snarled aloud, in vast contempt, and walked on, respected—many a city Clerk looking reverently at the great manager, many a City magnate owning to himself: "A clever fellow that. Close, but a jewel!"

"Mr. Lumby is waiting in his room, sir," said a clerk as the cashier passed through the offices.

"No sir;" said another; "he left five minutes ago."

"Ah!" said Garling, throwing the words across his shoulder as he walked, "I shall be here if he returns!"

Mr. Lumby did not return; and the cashier sat among his papers, and did his work deftly, with wonderful rapidity and accuracy in combination. Practice, says the adage, makes perfect. That is partly true even of dull men; but given a genius for the thing practiced, and it comes true literally. Four or five different sorts of men have I seen at work, and wondered. The keen sub-editor, skimming with eagle flight his daily papers; mark him—scissors in hand he sits, and his eye has gripped a page ere you have read the title line on the first column. Nothing there, and over goes the leaf. Ah, here! In goes the point of the scissors, out comes the destined scrap, and the

page is turned again. And, in brief, before you or I had fairly handled half a page with certainty, he has run through a dozen daily journals, missing nothing, but has skimmed the cream from each and all. This is the result of practice and a curious and rare talent. Ask any sub-editor how rare it is. Or see an able physician approaching a case over which commonplace men have been puzzled, and watch him as he lays his finger on the cause of ill. Or see a great barrister with a brief in hand, a brief of which he knows nothing, but from which he must construct a case in one hour's time to carry before judge and jury. You would say he absorbs and mentally assimilates the contents of a folio by touch, rather than that he reads it. Yet swiftly as he goes, he masters it; and in court, one brief hour hence, you might think him familiar with the complicated case from infancy. Or once again, see a young artist struggling to draw some impossible bit of foreshortening, and then see finished genius take the brushes. All these things are here named to typify Garling at his business. Came a tangle—his hand unraveled it. Anything wrong—his eye detected it. "Here is the flaw." The great piles of correspondence and sheets of figures to be examined melted before him. The piles examined grew and grew. It was a terrible pity that he was a scoundrel. It is related that a Greek father took his son to a merchant and proudly introduced him as "the greatest liar in the Levant." And the chronicler adds that the merchant accepted of the youth's service with tears of joy. But in the West we have got into the habit of regarding probity as a business essential. In all but honesty, Garling was a very pearl among business men. But what a "but!"

The night came. He could count the nights now for which it would be essential to remain for the completion of his plans. They were growing few, and in spite of the man's colossal composure, were growing terrible to endure. For it was not too late yet to restore all, and be honest, and yet well-to-do, and Conscience whispered sometimes that life would be sweeter so. It was no vulgar crime that that he had planned, as it was no vulgar criminal who planned it. Here, for now nine years, had he worked patiently and gently, unloosening every here and there with subtlest fingers a tie which held complete control from him, and gradually drawing every string of the vast

concern into his own hands. Then feeding his own resources slowly from those of the firm, and if needful, feeding the firm again from the fund thus fraudulently acquired, swelling his wicked gains year by year, and always fending off the crash to make his gains the larger—he had played his game so long that at last everything was his, and the great house of Lumby and Lumby was a bubble which would burst so soon as he shook it from his finger. There was nothing more to be got; the egg was sucked dry, the nut scraped clean out of the shell; and he waited merely for the transfer of his own legally acquired belongings to Spain, the swindler's refuge.

Now, as the time drew near, he adopted any precaution, no matter how ridiculous it seemed, that occurred to him; and on this night he took a little packet of cigar ash from his purse, and strewed a tiny pinch on the top of every one of those gigantic ledgers in which his secret slept. His fears had grown so morbid that he had to arm himself anew, as it were, at every crevice of the armor he had worn so long. Even as he did this, he sneered at himself, and mocked the fears which prompted him. "And yet," he muttered, "why should I be so infatuated as to miss any precaution I can think of. The books are not likely to be moved: but if they should be, I shall know it now."

CHAPTER XXII.

"I MUST GIVE MYSELF WHAT LAW I CAN."

THERE was a triumph in Garling's heart, though it had to share its throne with fear. He had fought against the world single-handed, and he was winning. Most crimes spring from egotism; and Garling's egotism was too great to leave the rest of the world the barest elbow-room. In his self-centered lonely life, this many a year, he had schooled himself thoroughly in that creed of Number One, which never needed teaching, and yet is taught so widely. You and I, who go about diffusing our sympathies on other people, miss the selfish, lonely raptures which warm the heart of the true egotist. He is not merely Gulliver in a Lilliput, to his own feeling, but he is so without the shad-

ow of a reason; for egotism and vanity may be, and often are, as separate as the poles; and he knows himself no taller, no wittier, no wiser, no handsomer, than the rest of mankind; but he is *I*, and that stupendous fact raises him until his forehead strikes the stars. He is the central fact of the universe. Round him, men and circumstances revolve, ministering to *his* comfort, or afflicting *his* bones. If Nature raises a tornado, it is on purpose to wreck *his* paper-boat in a gutter. Should a trampled people, after long centuries of groaning, rise, and tear the oppressor from his place of power, it is to depreciate the value of *his* shares in the market. If anything affect him not, it is nothing, though it wreck or build a world. And when a man thus armed as in triple brass against the woes of others and their joys, is cursed with the good gift of brains, he may scourge a continent like the great Bonaparte; or wreck a business firm or so, and break a trusting heart or two, like Garling.

Mary's life had been on the whole so dull, that a little sunshine went a long way with her. Her father's unexpected yielding had let in so broad and warm a gleam upon her darkened life, that in the few hours that passed between his going and his coming, the girl's heart had opened like a flower. When he returned that night, sunk deep in his own secrecy, and a world's width away from her in his desert egotism, she gave him a shy and tender welcome, and fluttered about him with shy and tender ways. His heart had no door for her, and her poor little attentions stung him. He bade her go to bed; and when she obeyed him, he kept his place with folded arms by the dull fire, and hugged himself, and worshiped his own triumph. Suddenly, as if a peal of thunder had broken in on music, one thought crashed through him, and brought him to his feet. What if his employer had heard the talk in his room that afternoon! Amazing, that he had never thought of that before. It was enough—had he heard it—to arouse Suspicion—though Trust had drugged her dead! Then fear took hold of him, and terror encompassed him. But he was not a man to be cowed, and could face even the phantoms from his own abysses; and his stout courage had beaten down his fears long before his nerves had ceased to twitch and tremble at them. In these matters the soul is like the wind, and the body like the sea. A child, chidden

for a fault, falls asleep, crying, and his pure mind runs into pure dreams, and his little heart is glad; but however the wind has fallen, the sea still heaves. You may hear him sobbing, though he smiles in his dream. And this elderly scoundrel's nerves still twitched and trembled, though his heart had grown stout again.

"If I am caught at last," he said, "and lose the game I have played for, what do I lose? The game, and only the game. Credit and liberty are mine still, and I am as well-to-do as honesty could have made me. There lies a quarter of a million safely housed in the Bank at Madrid, and accessible to me only. I am caught? Well and good. 'Let me go again, if you please, or, though you hang and quarter me, you touch none of your money.' Like other men, I have dreamed my dream, and I waken. Dream? It is no dream! What time remains for detection? I can be away at any hour. Why stay at all? Why stay?"

He took a Bradshaw from the table, and studied it. There was a night train set down there, leaving Waterloo Station for Southampton at half-past nine o'clock. A steam packet for Cadiz, calling at Corunna, was set down for the ninth and twenty-fourth of each month. This was the twenty-second. He decided in a flash. Whatever pretense of business was to be done to-morrow at the office, he would do, and be away by that night train. So, then, at last, the time was here; looked forward to for years, and terrible now it came. As he sat beside the fire, he could see the office going on for an hour or two, even a day or two without him—everybody going on in the old routine; and then, scared and astonished faces, whisperings, fears, amazement, the principals summoned; a meeting with the Bank manager, everybody present grave and pale—and then, the crash, and he on the seas far out of reach, or safely housed at Madrid.

"Let me see," he mused again, "I must give myself what law I can." He sat at the table, and wrote on the firm's paper one letter, running thus:

"MEMORANDUM.

"*To Messrs. Hutchinson & Co., Liverpool.*

"Kindly read inclosed, and if it suit your views, indorse, and forward to Parrivacini & Co., Buenos Ayres."

Then on plain letter paper, he wrote, dating from his own chambers:

"SIR,—Pray excuse my absence for a day. I am called away by private business of an urgent and particular nature. Yours respectfully,

"E. GARLING."

This epistle was intended for Mr. Lumby, at the offices of the firm. He inclosed it in an addressed envelope, which he stamped, and left open. Then putting both it and the memorandum in another envelope, he addressed it to Messrs. Hutchinson & Co., of Liverpool, and posted it at once with his own hand.

"Lawson will open it," said Garling with a chuckle, as he turned homeward again, "and thinking he sees a blunder, will post the inclosure at once. It will reach London, bearing the Liverpool postmark, on Wednesday morning. If by that time there should be any suspicion, the postmark will send them to Liverpool, whilst I am at the other end of the country." Lawson was the manager of the firm to which this ingenious blind was addressed; and so excited was Garling's imagination at this time, that to think of Lawson was to see him seated in his own room, smiling gravely at the supposed blunder by which the wrong letter had been inclosed to him. The inclosure was not in Garling's usual neat and trim calligraphy, but was written at headlong speed, to look hasty and flurried. "If it gives me but the day's law it will serve my turn," said the cashier, as he stood before his dying fire again. The night was late by this time, and the tide of life in the City's streets ran low. He sat for awhile listening to the fainter tones of traffic, and busy with the trifles of his scheme. The railway station with its hurrying crowds, its gleam of light and gloom of shadow, the guard's lamp waving, the train moving. The packet with its deck aswarm with life, the signal given, the hand-shakings and embraces; the ship in motion on dark waters, the lights of the town twinkling lower and lower, the long rolling of the open sea. He saw these things as he sat there. It was vain to try to sleep, so he heaped on more coals, and sat out the night, busy with trifles all the time. The night wore by, and the dawn looked in miserably, and after a time, Garling heard the

step of the laundress on the stairs, and retreated to his bedroom, where he bathed and shaved and dressed, emerging a little paler than ordinary, but not much. At the usual time, he went to the offices and to his own room there. The common routine of business done, he inspected the enormous ledgers which lined the room, mechanically pursuing the precaution of the previous night, whilst in his heart he laughed at it. But it weakened his knees beneath him to see that from one of those volumes the dust so carefully strewn had vanished. It was but a child's precaution, and yet it had discovered something.

"No creature has the keys but him and me," said the cashier, in a hoarse inward murmur. "Is the hunt afoot already? Was that fool overheard here after all?" And for all his courage, a cold perspiration burst out upon his forehead. But no man guessed his troubles, and no man watched his movements as he went in and out. He walked to his banker's. "Why should I finesse and wait?" he asked himself, and went calmly in and demanded to see the manager, by whom he was received with marked respect. "Do you know," asked Garling, closeted with the manager, "what people are saying about your affairs here?" The stroke he was prepared for was insolent in its audacity.

"What are they saying?" asked the manager, in surprise.

"You will learn soon enough," answered Garling. "I am getting nervous, perhaps; but I have the savings of my life-time here, and I can't afford to risk them. I want to close my account."

The manager looked thunderstruck, and assured him that, if any damaging rumors were afloat, they were utterly unfounded.

"Perhaps I am nervous," said Garling; "but I will close my account, if you please."

The official demurred. It was not courteous or business-like. Fears were preposterous.

"I will close my account, if you please," reiterated Garling. "Or," he added, "I, too, may have occasion to spread the rumors."

"Then by all means withdraw your balance," said the manager, half wrathful, half amazed; and Garling received his money—five or six thousand pounds—his own, honestly

his own, every penny of it—put it, mostly in Bank of England notes for one hundred pounds apiece, into a black leather satchel, and went his way. "I have shut *his* mouth," thought the cashier, with his own smile.

He went home, and found his daughter there, sewing. "Mary," he said, with placid gravity, "I have a piece of good news for you." She looked at him silently, with a half smile. She was beginning to think he meant kindly by her. "I have found a place for Mr. Search. It is in Southampton. Will you come there with me to-night? I want to take a house for him, and give him a surprise when he comes down to his new situation."

And this was the man she had thought so cruel! She would have overwhelmed him by her thanks, but he stopped her. "You will know better in a day or two for what you have to thank me," he said, meaning it quite truly, though the words carried a different sense to the speaker and the hearer. Then, locking his precious bag in his own room, he told her to have all things packed and ready by nine o'clock; and she having promised, he went to the offices again and bided his time. Cold and hard and grimly self-possessed as he looked, he suffered torments of suspense and dread. But he bided his time, and got through his routine, and finally went his way, leaving the mine to explode and the house which had nourished him to fall in ruins. And there was not a touch of ruth, or pity, or repentance in him. At nine o'clock he had a four-wheeled cab at his door, and the start was made in ample time. Familiar Fleet Street rumbled past him. He would never tread its pavement any more, but there would be rare talk of him there in a day or two. Let them talk—whoever chose! He had a quarter of a million sterling out in Spain, and he could afford to be talked of. Waterloo Road. The bridge, with the river flowing dark below it. The station, with its hurrying crowds. He had seen them all last night, in fancy so vivid they had all seemed real. He saw them in reality now, and they all seemed like a dream. Mary was already seated in the railway carriage, and he was standing at the door, with the black bag in his hand. Except for his daughter, the carriage was untenanted, and he laid the bag on the seat, and for one moment looked round, asking dimly if this were really a farewell to London. The guard's lamp waved, the whistle sounded, and Garling's

foot was on the step of the carriage, when a hand with a grip of iron took him by the arm.

"One word with you before you go, Garling."

The cashier's head turned more like that of an automaton than that of a living creature.

"Are you going?" cried the guard.

"No!" shouted Lumby, with his grasp tightening on Garling's arm. The two men—defrauder and defrauded—looked each other in the eyes. One read guilt and the other suspicion bursting into certainty. The train started.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RUNNING AWAY FROM DISHONOR.

VAL STRANGE sat alone in a smoking-carriage in a train bound for Southampton, and whither he might go from that starting-point, he neither knew nor cared. One place was likely to be as blank and empty as another for many a year to come, he thought, and the world held nothing worth doing or seeing or thinking about. He was sore against himself, for it seemed only his own blunder which had driven him away. He was angry with Gilbert for having betrayed his confidence, and angry with himself for having put it in his power to do so. He confessed that if he had warned Gilbert, the secret would have been safe in his hands; and he was very angry about his own stupidity. Once or twice his heart told him, "It is better as it is;" but on the whole it was not wonderful that this reflection had little power to soothe him. Reginald's declaration about their being "both men of honor" hit him hard. He had been honorable once, and he would have scorned in another the action which he himself had taken. He had planned to undermine his friend in the affections of his plighted wife. That was the plain English of the business, and black enough it looked when set forth simply so. But then came his excuses. Egotism, parent of dishonor and crime, put forth her plea. *He* loved, *he* suffered, *he* would be miserable for life. Not even yet had Egotism power to blind him altogether, and he saw that there were two sides to this, as to most other matters. Gerard loved, not so deeply as himself perhaps; for who could credit

that?—but still he loved her, beyond doubt, because no man could help it. And Gerard, if robbed of her, would suffer, too, though he would learn to live it down. Wonderful how easy it seemed, how likely it seemed—this learning to live it down—in the other man's case; how bitterly hopeless and dreary a prospect it presented in his own. This faculty of seeing your own side big, and other people's little, it is which makes wars, breeds hatreds, fills jails, and feeds the scaffold. The immortal precept which bids man love his neighbor as himself, aims a blow at crime, which, if it took effect, were fatal, for it strikes egotism dead; and the thief would no longer steal, if he, ignorant, vicious, and ugly, could be brought to know that the philanthropist, his victim, lovely in men's sight, learned and pious, has claims upon the world which are equal to his own. But he dreams not of it, and does not indeed properly realize any other human creature's existence. Other men are not alive to us, and therefore we injure or neglect them. They go about assuredly, and conduct business, and marry wives, and rear children, and what not; but it is only *you* who are really alive in the middle of these *simulacra*, only *you* who love thus passionately, who suffer thus profoundly, who dream thus loftily. It was not only the half cured blind man in Palestine who saw men but as trees walking.

Even in our bitterest hours we do things which are habitual to us. Val's cigar-case was his one source of comfort at all vacuous times, and he went to it now. Mechanically he drew it from its place, mechanically chose a cigar, mechanically felt in his pockets for a vesta. First here, and then there, his fingers strayed, until his mind woke up and took part in the task. The little silver box was lost, or left behind, and it became suddenly a matter of the gravest importance that poor Val should smoke. And here was a twenty miles run before him without a pause, and no chance of a whiff for an eternity of at least five-and-twenty minutes. Cruel fate! His anger at this circumstance became at length comic to himself, and he took to chaffing himself drearily about it; but he looked half a score times out of the window for the station within that score of miles, and consulted his watch again and again. Time had never seemed to hang more heavily. The train reached the station at last, and Val's carriage stopped opposite a refreshment-room. He leaped from his place to the

platform. "No time here, sir," an official on the platform warned him. "All right," cried Val; and dashing into the refreshment-room, called for a box of vestas, and being most leisurely supplied by the superior person in charge of the place, rushed back again to find the train in motion. "Here you are, sir!" cried the guard; and he made a dash for the carriage-door held open. The guard slammed it noisily behind him, and he had recaught the train by a fraction of a second. But this was not his carriage, and indeed not a smoking-compartment at all; and to make matters worse, it was occupied by a lady in mourning, who sat veiled in one corner. Val within himself spoke evil of the guard, and greatly fumed and fretted. The night was cold, his rugs were in the other carriage, and their sudden loss rendered him doubly susceptible to the chilly air.

"Ugh!" said the ill-used creature, folding his overcoat about his legs and settling himself in his corner as comfortably as he could. Just then a sound struck his ear which made him worse content than ever. The lady in the corner was crying, sobbing outright as if her heart would break. "More misery," said Val to himself, as though it injured him that his fellow-passenger should be unhappy. But he was naturally soft-hearted, and could not bear the sight of any other creature's trouble, least of all a woman's; and seeing how the slight figure heaved and shook with grief, he felt a swift touch of pity, and half involuntarily moved toward her.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said Val, baring his head, "but you are in trouble. Can I do anything for you?"

The poor thing only wept the more; but by and by stealing a look at him from under her veil, saw a handsome face full of pity looking at her with tender and troubled interest. "I have lost my father," said a girlish voice, so broken with sobs that it took half a minute to say it. Val looked at the deep mourning in which she was dressed, and nodded sympathetically. "No," she sobbed anew, reading his glance, "that is for my mother. I have lost my father at the railway station?"

"Oh," said he, "your father was traveling with you?"

"Yes," she said. "The train started, and left him behind."

"Oh," said Val; "he will come on by the next train. You mustn't be alarmed." She was quite a child, if he

could judge from her figure, her voice, and this abandonment of grief at so small a disaster. "Allow me to take care of you. How far are you going?"

"To Sou-Sou-Southampton," she said, and burst out crying anew, as though that made it worse than ever.

"Will anybody meet you there?" asked Val. "Have you friends in Southampton?"

"No," she answered.

"Never mind," said Val, soothingly. "It will all come smooth by and by. Papa will come on by the next train; and you must stop at an hotel to-night, and meet the train in the morning." This programme seemed perfectly satisfactory to him, and his voice and face did something to comfort the girl, though what he said did little. She put up her veil after a time; and he saw that she was somewhat older than he had fancied, and pretty in spite of her flushed cheeks and tearful eyes.

"But," she said, looking piteously at Val, "I ought to have a ticket?"

"Oh, yes," said Val, "you ought to have a ticket." And she wept anew. "Never mind," he said again. "Don't cry. You can pay at Southampton."

"But," she sobbed, in the simplicity of grief, "I haven't got any money!"

"Oh," said Val, "you haven't any money? Never mind. Don't cry. Hillo! Here's another station. Excuse me for a moment." Out he ran and accosting his servant, who was seated in an adjoining carriage, ordered him to transfer his belongings. He handed one of his rugs to his companion, and bestowed the other on himself; and he comforted her with sherry and sandwiches until she began to cry quite contentedly, and after a long time ceased to cry at all, only the waves could not settle at once, and a sob rose now and again. It was evident that she was not exactly a lady, and evident also that she was amazingly ignorant of the world. She was very frightened at the tunnels and bridges with their sudden deafening roar; and Val's kindly comments on this alarm of hers elicited the fact that she had never traveled by rail before. When, before entering the terminal station they were called upon for their tickets, she permitted Val to pay for her journey with no more remonstrance than a wistful look conveyed. She stood on the Southampton platform a few minutes

later, and gazed about her in pure bewilderment and terror, clinging to Val's arm. "Here," said Val, looking back into the carriage, "you have forgotten your bag. Have you any luggage?"

"I have a box," she answered, accepting the black bag from Val's hand; and away she went by his side to the luggage-van; and the box being extricated and recognized, her protector rather enjoying the situation, led her to an hotel, ordered a room for her, and had a cup of tea sent up to her. He promised to meet her at breakfast in the morning, and then sat down in a private room and smoked his fill, and was miserable. The fact of having done something for a fellow-creature in trouble was not without its comfort for him; but he came back to his own griefs. Going away, an exile, leaving love behind! That millions had suffered so before, was no salve to his sore heart. Running away from dishonor—that was something!—but his will was not in it. He would have stayed behind, had he taken his choice, and have drawn Love to his bosom though she brought dishonor with her. And that was a sad condition for a man to have come to. He had still enough honor left to see the disgrace to which he had been hurrying. "The grace being gained"—he was sitting with the sealed envelope, which held Constance's portrait, in his hand, and so had the line before him—"cures all disgrace in me." He knew that he would have to travel far before he could find a poorer sophistry than that. His conscience scorned it as a pun with no meaning; but Val hugged it, and tried hard to believe in it. It was significant of some power above himself, that he laid down the envelope without opening it, as he longed to do.

Meantime Hiram's little sweetheart slept soundly, and dreamed of Hiram, and of this wonderful, kind, good, new creature who had come into her life, and had been so generous. I do not believe that she had ever conversed with a gentleman until that evening, and she had been somewhat in awe of his splendors—the magnificent diamond on his white finger, his eyeglass, his mustache, his little pointed sixteenth-century beard, his fine clothes, for Val was always a dressy man, though he never overdid the thing. And then he had made absolutely nothing of money, of ever so much money, and he kept a man-servant, who dressed as well as Hiram, and looked almost as

grand. The hotel was such a building as she had never seen, except from the outside; and the furniture, and the waiters, and the chamber-maid, all rather overwhelmed her untraveled spirit. But she bestowed herself in the big bed with a combined sense of adventure and luxury, and was fast asleep in a few minutes, and slept, indeed, until the chamber-maid's knock aroused her. She looked neat and pretty in her plain black dress and spotless cuffs and collars of white linen, but she shrunk inwardly to think that only ladies had a right to be in so magnificent a place as this, and reflected with sadness that ladies always went habited in silken gorgeosities, with gold chains and real lace and other marvels about them. She ventured out into the vast hotel corridor, and its waste silence frightened her so much that she retreated, and felt so utterly lonely and deserted that the tears of last night were almost on flow again, when, with a little dictatorial knock, the chamber-maid entered and said that breakfast was ready. So Mary meekly followed the chamber-maid, who led her once more into Val's presence. Let it be recorded to his credit that he had on this occasion surrendered one of his own specially beloved habits. He disliked crowds and *table d'hôte*, and being rich enough to secure privacy wherever he went, had strengthened native tendency by habit, until a public eating-place was hateful to him. Breakfast, in especial, was a meal he liked to lounge over in privacy, in dressing-gown and slippers. But thinking wisely that the girl would rather be spared a *tête-à-tête*, and that her present position—alone, and with a male protector who was a stranger—demanded all possible delicacy of treatment, he ordered breakfast for two in the coffee-room, and thither she was shown. The breakfast service hit the untraveled maiden hard—the cut-glass, and the bright electro-plate, and the dish-covers. There were well-dressed people of both sexes in the room, and the room itself was large, lofty, and richly papered and corniced. She sat down in a tremor at all this, and Val had some little trouble in putting her completely at ease. Not that there was any open sign of *gaucherie* or ill-breeding about her—she would have passed for a lady with wonderfully little practice. After breakfast Val took her to meet the early train, but no Garling came by it, for the best of reasons—or the worst. She told him with child-like *naïveté* all her little story, if you except the fact of Hiram;

and Val learned that she had lived all her life with the mother whom she had so lately lost, poor thing, and had worked this last three years as a milliner in the city. She was not at all clear about Garling, but supposed he had been away abroad—vaguely, and had only lately returned.

"And you don't know where he was coming to—in Southampton?" her companion asked.

"No," she answered falteringly.

"And he doesn't know where to send you?"

"No," she said again. Val pondered as they went back from the station together. Was this mere child purposely thrown loose upon the world? Wickeder things than even that were done every day, and it was quite possible.

"Where does your father live?" he asked her. But as this question evidently embarrassed the girl, Val proceeded on another tack.

"Do you know anybody else in London who would take care of you?" he inquired.

"Oh yes," she said, brightening a little to think of Hiram. If she could only reach Hiram she was safe.

"Had you better not send a message and go back?"

"I can't send a message," she faltered. "I don't know the address."

"Can you find the address?" he demanded.

"No," she answered; "but I can find *him*. He conducts an omnibus, and it goes up and down Cheapside."

"Oh!" said Val, with a curious glance at her. "He conducts an omnibus, does he? And it goes up and down Cheapside? Very well, then. And you are quite sure of being safe, if you find him?"

"Oh yes," she cried, with so much certainty, that Val read the whole thing at once.

"Very well," he responded. "You had better go back to London. Do you know what to do with your luggage when you got to the station?" She knew nothing. "I never met such an unsophisticated little creature in my life before," he said to himself. He explained to her how to leave her luggage at the cloak-room, and to take a ticket for it; and next he sought out the station-master, and told him where to send any inquirer who might come from London on the outlook for a daughter. To be brief, he saw her away by the next train, Garling still being absent from the scene; and having paid for her ticket, he be-

stowed her in a carriage, committed her to the care of the guard, and slipped a five-pound note into her hand as the train moved off. His manly kindness to this poor waif of fortune thawed his own numbed heart awhile, and then he went away and forgot her. She never forgot him—it was scarcely possible that she should forget so notable a figure in her small life-history. She was faithful to Hiram; but a wonderful sort of worshiping admiration surrounded the kindly and generous stranger in her thoughts. Faithful to Hiram! Val no more disturbed her faith than if he had been a creature from another sphere, a conventional angel, or some other such wonderful wild-fowl. But she remembered him, alike with gratitude and affection, and eagerly repaid him when the time came. And it was not her fault if the service she rendered him went toward his own undoing; but his, who chose the service for her.

The weather was growing mild, and in the country places, spring was stealing up apace, working all her yearly miracles by the way. The air grew balmy, and the sky clear. "What does it matter to me where I go?" said Val, desperately. The open sea would somehow be in tune with his mood, he fancied; and so he shipped for the West Indies, after lounging for an uneasy day or two at Southampton; but speeding toward the Islands of Spice over a sea and under a heaven which grew daily more lovely, he found no peace of heart. He wrote before starting one brief letter to Reginald, in which every line breathed recklessness and despair. He had locked Constance's portrait in the largest of his trunks, and had it buried in the ship's hold, without much avail, since it haunted him through the long empty hours of a smooth and uneventful passage. Perhaps this voyage was as mistaken a remedy as he could anyhow have indulged in. He had nothing to do except to smoke and moon about the decks and think of Constance and his own unhappiness. His fellow-passengers were few and disagreeable. They comprised a Jewish lady who had been handsome, and remembered what had been so clearly, that she had no perception for the present, but dressed and ogled eagerly for Val's delight: a beady-eyed boy of twelve, her son, who had been at school in England, and was, from a combination of causes, downright intolerable: a ponderous British person, who oiled his hair, wore crumpled linen, and much flash jewelry, and

spread dirty hands on the dinner-table to have his rings admired: and a couple of British youths fresh from school, who were going out to a sugar estate in Jamaica. These young gentlemen being newly liberated from the restraints of civilization, drank brandy-and-water all day long, and smoked, by way of announcing the complete attainment of the rights of man, the vilest Cavendish to be got for love or money. The condition of Val's mind was such that these people one and all became hateful to him. They were not nice people, and under any circumstances he would have chosen their room rather than their company; but now they seemed to inspire him with a disgust of all his species. For the first time in his life, he was morose for a week together; and being forced inward, he fed upon his own heart, and found it innutritive and spiritually unpalatable. He was so far gone, that he never once brought himself steadily to contemplate this as a final parting from Constance, and when that view of the journey insisted on being faced, he put it away from him savagely. He was going away—that was enough, surely. He was already absent and in pain; why torture himself needlessly? Slowly but surely, his mind began to slide back to the contemplation of an immediate return. It was clear enough that if he ventured upon such a course, it must be pursued secretly and without Reginald's knowledge; and thus he found himself pledged to crookeder courses at every succeeding stage. This journey began to assume the aspect of a penance voluntarily undertaken, and turning out to be unavailing. Val found it anything but easy or pleasant to be a scoundrel; he was so unfortunately susceptible of popular opinion, so anxious to stand well with all men, and to have the good opinion even of strangers. This feeling operated now so decidedly, that even when he had determined to return, he would not go back by the ship in which he made the outward voyage, lest the captain and the crew should think him an uncertain vacillating fellow who did not know his mind, and was moving vacuously for no purpose about the world. He even made a pretense of business to his servant, whilst awaiting the departure of the next homeward-bound vessel, to conciliate *his* good opinion. Excuses were not lacking for him, as he steamed homeward. He had gone away, and found it impossible to remain. Perhaps, after all, circumstances might hold him apart from Constance.

Perhaps, even—so monstrous a shape could self-delusion take—he might see more of her, and become disillusionized. Val Strange was not a fool by nature, and yet he accepted even this preposterous pretense of an excuse, and persuaded himself that it was probable.

He reached England, and journeyed back to London. But town was growing full, and he was afraid of observation, and avoided his clubs and his old companions. He nevertheless contrived to learn that Constance had returned with her father and brother to the Grange, and moved by some desperate impulse, ran down to Ryde where his yacht was lying, and sailed for Welbeck Head, in the mad hope that somehow he might get a glimpse of her. Before he sighted the Head, he had been absent from Constance six weeks, and in that time great events had taken place.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"OF HOW MUCH HAVE YOU ROBBED US?"

HAD Garling's nerves been of steel instead of the ordinary human fiber a shade tougher than common, he must needs have shaken a little when that grip fell upon his arm and the voice of his employer sounded in his ear. His head turned slowly, and he looked across his shoulder, meeting Lumby eye to eye. There was a wicked light in the eyes of both men. The merchant looked like a duelist ready to give account of a hated foe; the cashier's glance was like a snake's. Away rumbled the train; and for half a minute after it had gone, the two stood on the deserted platform, looking at each other in the light of a lamp which stood close by, casting its rays between them. In the tension of *his* nerves, Garling was unconscious of the grasp, after the first shock it gave him. Cool and ready as he was by nature, and swiftly as his mind recovered itself, that wicked frozen glance lasted long enough to betray him a hundred times over.

"May I ask," he said in a voice that grated curiously, and had to be strangely forced to make it audible, "the meaning of this rather remarkable greeting?"

The merchant kept his eyes upon him, and for sole answer gripped by the other arm and shook him, very slight-

ly, but strongly. This position made it somewhat difficult for Garling to look round; for his employer having in the first instance approached him from the rear, had laid his right hand on Garling's right arm, and now having grasped the other with his left, he stood almost behind his captive. The latter made no attempt to move, but kept that wicked backward-glancing eye upon the other's face. "Pray, explain this curious action!" he said in the same grating tones.

"You villain!" cried the other, shaking him anew—"you scoundrel!" His voice also had undergone a change, and sounded harsh and low.

"You will regret this violence," said Garling.

Lumby, without reply, thrust an arm through his, and led him from the platform. It would have been useless for Garling to resist, and he knowing that, was too wise to try. Lumby held to him so tightly, that when they came to enter the hansom, they bundled in together awkwardly, and the cashier found divers corners of himself contused. The cabman having received his instructions, drove in the direction of the offices, and the merchant gripped his captive all the way. In Garling's mind there was such blank despair and rage as only a foiled scoundrel is permitted to experience. To have come so near, after waiting so long, and at last on the very verge of victory, to be thus ignominiously taken, was maddening. Frenzies of rage and disappointment shook his heart, and if he had had a weapon in his hand, there were moments in that brief ride in which he would have willingly struck his captor dead. But he had still a stake to play for, though all his base gains of the past nine years were lost; and that stake was dear to him, for it was nothing less than liberty. There was such a strain of caution in the man, that he had counted on this failure all along, and had planned as carefully to meet it as if it had been certain. Not that it was any the less exasperating, now it came, for this prevision. His murderous glance, as he cast it now and again sideways on the fixed and silent face beside him, was warrant enough for that.

The offices being reached, Mr. Lumby made the cabman dismount and ring the bell; and it was not until the night-watchman had opened the door that he permitted Garling to alight. "Somethin' real serious on foot," thought the

night-watchman, noting even on Garling's impassive face a shade he had never seen there until now, in all his knowledge of him. The cabman dismissed, the merchant marshaled Garling to his own room. As he went, the cashier saw that the gas jets were lighted all along that way, and nowhere else, as though warning had been given of their coming. He was in a mood to notice everything more closely than usual, and the great doors closing outside sounded to him like the closing of the doors of a jail with him an inmate. At any other time, he thought, the sound would have fallen on his ears unheeded. He was cool enough to smile at that, and to murmur to himself, "Nerves!" by way of explanation.

The merchant locked the door, and always holding a wary eye upon the other, turned up the gas. Garling laid his hat upon the table, and stood observant. There was so little change in him, so little sign of fluster or fear, that his employer was almost staggered, looking at him. Could he look so cool, and yet be guilty? They faced each other.

"I have had reasons given me lately," said Lumby slowly, panting a little as he spoke, "to suspect your probity. I have been making an investigation of those books, and have found that you began a fraud upon the firm nine years ago. I presume, since I found you in the act of escape to-night, that you have completed your fraud. Or had you learned that I was tracing you?"

Garling looked at him with glittering eyes, his head bent somewhat downward, his lips drawn tighter than was common with him, and a little paler. His skin had fallen from its ordinary sallow hue to a sort of stony gray.

"When did he begin to suspect?" he asked himself. "How much does he know? Is there anything I can save from this ruin of my plans?" But he answered never a word.

"Speak!" said the merchant, panting at him, in an agitation terrible to look at. "Of how much have you robbed the firm?" His face was alternately gray and purple. His features jerked and quivered, his hands shook, and a visible tremor possessed his whole body. Garling read his own advantage in all these signs, and still said not a word. "Speak! you—you scoundrel!" cried Lumby falling anew upon him, and seizing him by the waistcoat and the bosom of his shirt. "Of how much have you robbed us?"

"Of not one halfpenny!" said Garling stonily. The words and manner so amazed the merchant that he dropped his hands. The cashier moved quietly, so as to place the table between them, keeping his eyes on Lumby as he stepped, and, laying one hand on the table, leaned slightly forward, whilst with the other he arranged his disordered dress. In this attitude he spoke again: "Of not one halfpenny, or of everything—according as you use me."

If any third person could have looked upon the scene at this minute, he might well have been excused had he mistaken the several parts they played. The just employer sunk into a seat with his hands drooping by his sides and a face of extreme pallor. The fraudulent cashier, pale enough in all conscience, but self-possessed and firm, looked down upon him across the table, still fumbling with his hand at his bosom. Coupled with the calm in which he stood and the cruel look upon his face, the action, simple as it was, seemed deadly. It was as if he searched slowly and calmly for a weapon, and had the will to use it. Lumby made a great effort, and resumed something like composure.

"I might have guessed beforehand," he said slowly, in a voice unlike his own, "that if you chose a criminal course, you would go boldly and warily. I know now that you have chosen such a course, and I tell you that the safest plan for you is to make a clean breast of it and confess everything. Of how much have you robbed us?"

"Either of nothing, or of everything," responded Garling. "It is in your power to bring down utter ruin, or to recover all. Your treatment of me will determine that."

"You mean that the firm is in your power?"

"Precisely," said Garling.

"I do not know how that can be," said Lumby; "but it is a question easily tested." He struck his hand heavily upon the bell which lay upon the table.

"I recommend you to pause," said the cashier, coldly. "If you fulfill your present purpose, you are ruined."

"I will see," returned the merchant.

"You will see," said Garling, calmly. "You propose to arrest me? Good. You may save yourself the trouble of opening your doors to-morrow. If I am arrested, the firm is bankrupt—hopelessly insolvent."

"We shall see," said Lumby. The cashier's voice and

face, however, made such impression on him that when the heavy footsteps of the night-watchman sounded in the corridor, he arose and waited at the closed door for his knock. The knock came, and Lumby opening the door, said only: "Wait at the end of the corridor. I may want you in a moment." He kept his eyes on Garling; and if in that stony and impassive countenance of his he had read a touch of fear or of boasting, either would have decided him. But he saw neither one nor the other. Garling had this advantage: he was enacting in earnest a scene which he had countless times rehearsed in fancy—and to play it well or ill was almost life or death to him. The door was closed and locked again, and the heavy footsteps retreated to the end of the corridor. Lumby, though liable to sudden gusts of passionate anger, and less under control than the other, was growing strung to something like the enemy's pitch. The intensity of mood had been beyond words already; but the intensity of manner was now increased tenfold by the near neighborhood of the man, which reduced speech almost to a whisper. The merchant felt he had nothing to lose by a pause—he could afford to wait long enough to get light to go by.

"Are you prepared," he asked, "to make a full confession and restitution? Is that your meaning?"

"I may be induced to mean something like that," the cashier answered.

"You may be induced?"

"I may be induced." The villain's composure was a study.

"To mean something like that?"—with bitter irony.

"Something nearly approaching to it; yes"—with perfect business-like precision and quiet.

"Will you be so good as to tell me how we are in your power?"

"I will explain," said Garling, clearing his throat slightly.

"Thank you," returned Lumby—"if you will be so good." Their eyes met again, and Garling's fell. His face became a little paler in its gray; but he cleared his throat again and went on. His hand was still fumbling at his breast automatically, though he had forgotten the purpose which first sent it there.

"I proceeded in this matter," he said, harshly and dryly,

"with much caution and foresight. I have never been a spendthrift, and in fact I have always lived well within my income. As a result of that, I have been enabled to employ such sums as I have transferred to my own service to considerable advantage, and ultimately to pass them, through varying channels, to swell the store I had begun to accumulate abroad." The merchant listened with a face as gray as Garling's own. "The accumulations becoming in course of years, say three or four years, considerable, I was enabled to keep up a constant circulation of capital with such irregular additions and diminutions in the flow as would occur naturally in the course of an extensive business. At the end of perhaps five years, the impossibility of further operations of that simple order clearly declared itself. But by throwing up my plans at that time, I should have killed the goose which laid the eggs without having filled my basket. You will understand that at this time—now four years ago—everything that could be drawn from the firm in its then condition had been drawn, and that the firm lived by the continued circulation of that foreign hoard. I had labored, as you know, to increase the scope of the House's operations, and in that direction I still labored with some not inconsiderable measure of success." Half a dozen times in the course of this statement the cashier raised his eyes, and meeting his employer's glance, looked down again. "It would have been possible, since the original capital of the House was not only intact, but multiplied, to have proceeded upon this plan indefinitely. But I found myself already past middle age, and—delays are dangerous. The channels in which the funds flowed, if I make myself clear—were circular. It was competent for me to arrest them at any point of the circle. That was a work of much delicacy, and demanded care and time. You will excuse me for offering you at this point only a general statement, and for avoiding detail which might obscure a broad view of the position. In brief, the various channels have all been directed into one reservoir, and have there discharged themselves. There is a drop or two in the London pipes, but nothing elsewhere. And the disadvantage of the House, and my advantage is, that the reservoir is available to me only."

Mr. Lumby sat still and looked at Garling. He had read of frauds, heard of them in plenty, had even assisted

at the investigation of one or two; but he had never met with anything like the massive insolence, the colossal audacity of this defrauder.

"You had completed your work," he said at length, "and you were going to-night"—Garling slightly inclined his head, and moistened his dry lips a little with the tip of his tongue—"leaving the firm insolvent?"

"Leaving the firm insolvent!" Garling answered like a husky echo.

"And being caught," said Lumby with a transient flush of triumph, "you are ready to disgorge?"

"Partly," answered Garling, "and upon conditions."

"I will accept no partial restoration," said the merchant, by this time restored to full possession of himself, "and I will make no conditions with you."

"That is for you to decide," responded Garling, "not for me. But except upon my own conditions, my lips are sealed. You have no clew—forgive me if I lay the matter before you plainly—you have no clew at present to the whereabouts of the money, and if you should discover it, you can not handle it."

"I can send you to penal servitude, probably for life," returned the merchant; "and having done that I can accept my fate equably."

"You are willing to buy revenge at too dear a rate," said Garling; "and so far you have nothing to punish but the intention of a wrong. I heard it whispered this afternoon that you had intended to introduce Mr. Gerard into the firm. If his wishes were consulted, now?"

"Garling," said the head of the firm with measured sarcasm, "it is to be regretted that you have made so poor a use of your talents. I had always a high opinion of your powers, and until now I never saw the flaw in them, or you. In me, you are utterly mistaken. You measure me by yourself, and in doing that you really offer me too much injustice. I will have no traffic with you until I have a full and complete surrender. I will make no promise, or hint at any promise, until you throw yourself entirely on my mercy; for I vow," he cried, with a sudden passion of righteous anger, "that I would rather see my son break stones by the wayside, than make him a Crœsus by stopping to barter with your villainy. Decide then, and decide quickly. You may beggar me and mine; but, please God,

you shall not smear our honest hands by passing any gift to them through yours." Before this burst of wrath, Garling bowed his head gravely and quietly, and spread both hands abroad a little, as if deprecating an exaggerated view of things. Seeing this, the merchant again brought his hand down heavily upon the bell; and the watchman—who had heard his master's voice raised high in anger—came with alacrity to answer it. "Decide!" said Lumby again, in a high voice, which rang like a knell in Garling's ears. But the cashier had played his game too long to be willing to relinquish all; and what daring could do he would do. With him the position was like that of a player in the American game of "Brag," and he had a shrewd suspicion that Lumby was in something of the same mood with himself. So, when the merchant cried "Decide!" he waved his hands again with a repetition of the deprecatory gesture, and with a little downward motion of the head, he answered, "I have decided." The passionless gray of his face fell a tone lower, and Lumby saw it. Everything depended—for Garling's surmise respecting him was true—or seemed to depend, on his own promptitude and fearlessness of action. He called "Come in!" in answer to the watchman's knock, and threw the door wide open.

"You abide by your decision?" he asked, briefly and sternly.

"I abide by it," was Garling's answer. "Yes." His cue was to conceal emotion, and he followed it well; but he could not hide the moisture on his forehead, nor the twitching of his ashen lips, nor the tremor of his hand.

"I have your last word?" said Lumby. "Remember! The next step is beyond recall."

"So be it," returned Garling. Since the opening of the door, their colloquy had been carried on in a low murmur, apart from the watchman, who, having advanced no further than the mat in the door-way, stood there respectfully, twirling his cap in both hands. Lumby with one look, which fell full in Garling's eyes, turned to the man. He had but addressed him by name, when the cashier's voice, chill and measured, rose behind him, saying: "Horton! You may go outside for a moment, and close the door." The man, with a look at his employer, obeyed. "I throw up my hand," said Garling. It was well for him that he read faces quickly and truly, and that he could

estimate aright the resolution expressed in the gesture with which the merchant had turned away from him. "I ask only one pledge."

"I will give you no pledge at all," returned the merchant.

"Permit me," said Garling dryly, pushing a letter-clip along the table with one hand and trifling with the spring. "In this matter, I would venture to urge that you have scarcely any option. It is of more importance to recover your money than to have me transported. Until I receive your pledge that I go free, I will not speak a word." His employer looked at him with a doubtful mastery of aspect. "Observe. To imprison me is to call down certain ruin. Give me the pledge I ask for, and you have power enough to shake your last halfpenny from me. You have brains enough to see that!" he added coarsely.

Lumby regarded him steadfastly. "You are a cunning villain, Garling, and you have laid your plans well. I suppose I must wrong society by turning you loose upon the world. Have you—forgive my curiosity—any remorse for having rewarded an old friend's kindness in this way? Why, you cur, have you no memory in the favors heaped upon you? Haven't you a blush? The blood is ashamed of that fox-face of yours, and runs away from it. You scoundrel!" This speech was dictated by many impulses. There was satire in it, and sorrow in it. There were contempt and anger. The final expletive was one of almost unmixed wonder. As for Garling, there was no denying that he bore the situation well. He had failed. The long-drawn and elaborate plot on which his splendid financial genius had for nine years centered itself, had crumbled to dust in an hour, every strand and thread of it dissolved, as though it had been woven of sand. He made no pretense of not caring, and gave no sign of being overwhelmed. He did not rage, and he did not fall into flippancy. He had missed the issue of his life, and this failure told him so. He had been phenomenal among swindlers, and had failed as vulgarly, and been caught as ignominiously as any City prentice who steals from the shop-till and is taken by the ear in the act. Where under these circumstances was the good of having been phenomenal? And here was old age coming—he felt old now—he had been young twelve hours ago, comparatively—and he was dishonored and thrown

loose upon the world. Well, he would not grumble. He had weighed the stakes before he played for them, and he had staked and—lost. All that was left now was to come out of the ruin with as little damage as possible—or at least with as little sign of damage. So he bore his employer's reproaches with a contempt which under the circumstances was hardly curious.

"Let us be business-like," he urged. The leviathan impudence of this reproach struck Lumby dumb, and even when he had recovered, it had the effect of restraining any further expression of his wrath. Speech was plainly of no effect in this case. "If," pursued Garling, "you will draw up a statement of your own intention with regard to me, I will put into your hands my private ledgers, which will show you everything at a glance."

"Are you so ignorant of the criminal code of England," asked Lumby, "as to suppose that any assurance of mine given now can hinder me from prosecuting you?"

"I am not so ignorant of *you*," returned Garling, "as not to know that you will not expose yourself as having gone back from your written word."

"You have my word," said the merchant.

"I can't show your word in court, if you deceive me," said Garling.

"I suppose," asked Lumby, "that you have no belief in any man's honor?"

"I never had," responded the defrauder grimly. And there, probably enough, was the key to his ruin. Lumby yielded, and wrote out the pledge he asked for, setting forth that it was given only on condition of complete restitution. Garling thereafter sat down to the table and prepared an abstract report of his villainy. It took an hour or two's hard writing; and Lumby read it sheet by sheet as the late cashier laid it methodically by. It was luminous, and the very soul of brevity, considering its mass of unavoidable detail. Garling's financial genius permitted him to append to this report a sort of swindler's balance-sheet, in which the precise position of affairs was shown, and wherein, by a marvelous effort of memory, dates and figures were set down, as it afterward turned out, with scrupulous exactness.

"My private ledgers," said Garling, "will afford more extended information. The final appeal must be made here."

He pointed to the vast volumes ranged along one side of the room.

"But that," he added, "will be a work of time."

The balance-sheet at the end of Garling's abstract had rather an air of hocus-pocus to the merchant. It seemed scarcely credible, for one thing, that memory should be so minutely retentive; and he insisted, without loss of time, on comparing it with the defrauder's private entries. To this end, between two and three o'clock in the morning, he escorted the cashier home. Before he started, however, he locked the confession in his own drawer.

"It might seem worth while to murder me for that, if you had a chance to do it in your own place, quietly—eh, Garling?"

"No," responded Garling, with a voice of tranquillity. They walked to what had been Garling's home together, and they worked till daylight. The merchant made him sit down at the table whilst he stood behind him, or occasionally, for a change of posture, knelt upon a chair.

"It is now eight o'clock," said Lumby, when the balance-sheet was verified. "You will report yourself at the office to me at ten. If you are five minutes late, I shall give information to the police."

CHAPTER XXV.

"HE'S AN AWFULLY ODD FISH IS STRANGE."

HAD Gerard known that Constance was going to London, he might perhaps have been more ready to accompany his father thither. But, as a matter of fact, the visit was unpremeditated. The maiden aunt in Chesterfieid Street, Mayfair, had money, and was known to be kindly disposed to Constance. When, therefore, the old lady, learning from her brother that he was about to visit London, expressed a strong hope that he would bring Constance with him, Mr. Jolly accepted the desire as a command. He was not unaware of the importance of money; and though Constance seemed already fairly provided for, it would still be unwise not to conciliate the maiden aunt, who was naturally anxious to learn at first-hand the details of her niece's engagement. And if Lucretia—that

was the name of the maiden aunt—should express any intentions with respect to her testamentary dispositions, Mr. Jolly was quite persuaded that at such a juncture nothing could be more natural. It was not difficult to persuade Constance; for, to tell the truth, she was beginning to find the social atmosphere of the Grange a little stifling. Her father's dull pomposities and shallow aphorisms were insufferably tedious. There are a good many dull and pompous fathers in the world, whose daughters, aided by Love, revere and admire them. Constance was unhappily without Love's aid, and her father wearied her exactly as any other prosy person would have done. In his inmost soul, Mr. Jolly had an idea that his style was Disraelian. He was Conservative in politics, and modeled himself naturally on the lines of his party chief. But it is not everybody who can fight in Saul's armor, and the Disraelian style, handled by Mr. Jolly, was a cruel thing to suffer under. Reginald found it endurable, because it awakened his own sense of humor. He saw the fun of it; but Constance, who, like many charming women, had but a limited perception of fun, saw and felt only its dreariness. The house itself was somewhat dull after that fever of festivity into which Mr. Jolly had for a time plunged it, and she was willing to welcome any reasonable pretense which called her away from it. These two were the reasons which she admitted to herself; but there was another which had more weight than both of them, although she was reluctant to own it—she was weary of Gerard.

Admiration is a pleasant thing to endure, but the signs of it may be so presented as to grow tedious. Gerard had no small-talk, and his icy divinity froze him. He was not happy in her presence; but his dreams of her presence made him happy. There was not the faintest doubt in his mind that when once they were married, they would live a life of pattern felicity. The old truth which it was Pope's good fortune to crystallize for English-speaking people, operated here as elsewhere:

> Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
> Man never is, but always to be blest.

The future was roseate; the present, misty. Always that wonderful glamour, which perhaps alone makes life worth living, lay about to-morrow, but never about to-day.

Whether it were an old device or a new one, I can not say, but I remember in the year 1865 I witnessed an acted morality or mystery, the memory of which has remained with me. The scene was the cavalry barracks at Cahir, in County Tipperary—the occasion, the annual regimental sports of the Fourth Royal Irish Dragoon Guards. When the sword-exercise and foil-play and boxing, the running, walking, leaping, and vaulting matches were over—when the men had raced behind wheelbarrows and jumped in sacks, and the tug-of-war was lost and won, there came, to crown the festival, a donkey-race. Private Paddy Byrne, a regimental unit attached to the F Troop—this is not fiction, but history: and when, oh when, did it cross Paddy's mind that an old comrade would put *him* in a novel?—with a wonderful laughable Irish grin on the Hibernian face of him, perched himself an inch or two for'ard of his donkey's tail, and laid between the moke's ears a switch, on the end whereof swung two inviting carrots and a clean white turnip. Away went the donkey in pursuit of these tidbits, never more than a stride's length from his watering teeth, yet never attainable. Every stride deceived him; but Hope sprung eternal in the asinine bosom, and he still pursued. I was young and thoughtless in those days, and at this acted mystery I laughed unthinkingly. But in the years which have gone since then, I know now that not a day has passed in which I have not with equal wisdom raced after something no more worth having and no more attainable, and Paddy Byrne's donkey has with me risen to the dignity of a moral *mythus*, preaching eternal truths. And he typifies, indeed, not me alone, but a whole hungry foolish world, tearing headlong in pursuit of that sweet and dear to-morrow which it never reaches. With the rest of the world, let him typify this poor hungry-hearted Gerard. "If I laugh," wrote the saddest satirist that ever put pen to paper, "'tis that I may not weep." One may as well put things cheerfully as sorrowfully. You may suck marrow of mirth, and grow as wise as by sipping the salt of tears—if you are a born angel, and a saint by nature.

Mr. Jolly apprised Constance, in the afternoon, of her aunt's desire; and it was decided they should all three go to town together on the following day. Gerard came in the evening as usual; but she allowed him to ride away without telling of the arrangement made. An hour before

starting she sent him a brief note, saying that her aunt desired to see her, and that she was going to London, but of design aforethought, forgot to give her lover her town address. She remedied this omission a day or two later, when she had secured a little quiet, and had discovered that it is better to be bored by admiration than not to be admired at all. To her amazement, Gerard did not fly to her when she lifted her finger. A day or two passed, and she did not hear from him. Matters grew a little wonderful, and even a little alarming. We have seen already that Val Strange made a call upon her. Familiar as Val contrived to seem in Reginald's eyes, this was his first visit; but he and Miss Lucretia were known to each other beforehand, and Val was a reminder to the old lady of her one romance. These renewals of youth are singular. Val's father was the only one among many admirers for whom Miss Lucretia in her youth had cared; but with that perversity which is a part of love, they had quarreled over some trifle or other no bigger than a mote in a sunbeam, and had so parted—the man to forget as men forget, the woman to remember as women remember. Of this the young fellow knew nothing. Had he known, he might have sought the sympathy and intervention of the old lady, and have besought her to implore Constance to break off a loveless engagement. Is it hard to say whether such a course could or could not have been justified, though there is little doubt that Val would have been able to justify it to himself. But he was ignorant of the tie between himself and the old maid, and knew nothing of the affection with which she regarded him. Had he known, the course of this story might have been altered; but then, there is nothing so slight in life that it might not alter the course of any human tragedy or comedy. And now Val was gone from Constance's little circle, and still no Gerard came. The absence of one, and the silence of the other, became remarkable, before Reginald came to explain one of the phenomena, and a shock which was in its way a sort of social earthquake, came to explain the second. Reginald lounged in a day or two after Val's departure, and found his sister alone. Some conversational preliminaries being gone through which had but little interest for either of them, Reginald said casually: "I say, Con., did Strange tell you he was going to the West Indies?"

"No," said Constance, bending closer over her embroidery. "When is he going?" She tried to make the question sound commonplace and disinterested, but read failure in her own tones.

"Oh," said Reginald, ensconcing himself for more safety behind his eyeglass, and watching her keenly, "he's gone. Started yesterday."

Constance, with a great effort, retained composure. "Why did he go?" she asked. "Had he business there—property there?"

"Oh," said the wary youth, "you never know where to have Strange. You'd think he was dead set on something or other, and meant to spend his life at it, and in half an hour he's dead set on something else. As I told him the other day, he's like Dryden's Duke of Buckingham, 'Everything by turns, and nothing long.' You never know what he'll do next."

Women are much better actresses than men are actors, and when Constance spoke, her nonchalance might have puzzled a less careful observer. She held her embroidery a little from her in both hands, turned her beautiful head this way and that, regarding it, and then, slowly raising her violet eyes, she dropped one negligent word: "Indeed?" But she had not calculated that Reginald suspected, and was watching, and so she overdid it by a trifle, and seemed to his keen vision supernaturally indifferent.

"Yes," murmured the watcher, fixing his eyeglass with a facial contortion which laid the ghost of expression still lingering, "he's an awfully odd fish is Strange. You really never know where to have him." He was modest enough to distrust his own powers, and he stopped short there, having done enough, as he conceived, for one day. His finesse was well meant, and for the moment it was satisfactory.

"So," said Constance to herself, "he has run away to avoid me." Her heart sunk at this desertion. She had forbidden Strange ever to speak on the topic he had once broached to her; but she had not forbidden him her presence, and indeed had not the strength of heart so to deny him or herself. She pitied him—it was sweet to pity him. Before she had heard his confession, she had gone the usual maiden path to love, and had not known to what goal it led her. She found his society pleasant, more

pleasant than that of any man she had ever encountered—so much she was aware of. She knew that her society was pleasing to him; but for so beautiful a woman, she was amazingly devoid of vanity, and no thought of his being in love with her crossed her mind. For that matter her engagement to Gerard seemed to hem her about with a sort of Society sacredness—men did not fall in love with young ladies who were engaged to be married. And when at last Strange's wild declaration was made, her own heart answered it with a voice which there was no chance of mistaking. Here at last was the man who held the key to her heart, out of all the scores who had come a-wooing, and he came too late. It might have seemed easy enough to do the only thing which under the circumstances was wise and honorable—namely, to send Gerard his dismissal and to tell him that a union between them could lead only to unhappiness. But the wise and right thing to do is not always that which presents itself most attractively, and she had no one to advise and help her. That Gerard would have freed her, had she appealed to him, though he broke his heart in doing it, went of course without saying. But then, there was the natural disinclination to so pronounced an action, the natural fear of his silent reproach, the natural dread of the county talk. It would be bitter to be called a jilt; and there was no reason or shadow of a reason, except the true one, which she could assign against her engagement to Gerard. So, like wiser people, she decided to let things take their course for a time with a vague hope that something might come to pass which would unravel the tangled skein and lay it out straight and smooth once more. And her reluctance to pain Gerard had more ground than a natural tenderness of disposition which is happily common to most women. She respected him, and in her secret heart was sensitively afraid of his ill opinion. Notwithstanding the general chilliness of their courtship, they might have made a very happy married pair, but for the advent of Val Strange. It is only in novels that husband and wife are kept apart by those thread-like filaments of feeling of which a certain school of feminine romancists are so prodigal. The plain English of that matter is, that unless a man is absolutely distasteful, or the woman's mind is preoccupied, marriage is the shortest way to love, and the surest.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"MY DEAR," SAID THE OLD LADY, "YOU ARE FRETTING ABOUT SOMETHING."

To Constance's mind, Val's precipitate flight spoke only of a longing and a despair which had grown unendurable. She saw him fighting for honor's sake, flying all he held dear, and going away into a void world which had no chance of solace for him. The true and honest ring of the old cavalier's verse was in her mind, with a meaning in it which was new to her, because she felt it echoing in fancy from her despairing lover's soul:

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honor more."

He had fled for honor's sake; and for that, though it wounded her sorely, she half deified him. Once before—as she knew—he had struggled to escape her charm, and had failed. She had trembled to think of that; yet where on earth is the woman who would not have been pleased by so magnificent a compliment? When she could escape from Reginald's presence, she fled to her own room, and cried to think of Val, and his love and courage and forlornness. He proved his love by running away from her, and with a rare magnanimity, trusted to her to understand and forgive; nay, perhaps with a magnanimity rarer still, trusted to offend her by the *brusquerie* of his departure, and so turn her heart toward Gerard once again. We who are behind the scenes, and know the course of circumstances which dictated Val's flight, can scarcely share her exalted notions of his delicacy, his honor, and his courage. But howsoever mistaken she might be, her thoughts of him were valuable to herself. "He helps me back to the path of honor," she said, even while she wept his departure. "I am pledged to Gerard, and I must be true to my word. I must try to love Gerard: that is my only real safeguard." Poor girl! When did ever love go forth in answer to commandment? Yet there was this help—that Val had put a distance of real reverence between them, and obviously meant to return no more until he could return in safety.

She was proud, and she was pure-minded, and purely bred, and habits of thought and feeling are strong things even when assaulted by the Passions. She would not scorn herself so far as to fancy that if once she were safely married to Gerard, any man could move her to one unfaithful or regretful thought. And now she began to long for that union to which she had looked forward hitherto either with coldness or with shrinking.

No word from Gerard. She besieged herself with questions as to the meaning of his silence, and could find no answer. Her lovely cheek paled with the inward conflict; and Miss Lucretia, who knew of nothing but happiness in her fortunate niece's lot, must needs send for a doctor, who prescribed a tonic. Constance submitted, but left his medicine untasted; and Miss Lucretia remonstrated, and had terrible visions of a premature grave for her beautiful niece.

"My dear Constance," the old lady said at length, being fairly frightened by the girl's languor and want of appetite, and the pallor which had taken the place of her late lovely bloom, "I must insist—I really must insist upon your taking the mixture." She poured out a dose, and advanced with it, bearing the wine-glass in one hand, and in the other, daintily held between finger and thumb, a lump of sugar. Constance, too languid to resist, accepted the medicine, but refused the sugar. She had almost lost all sense of taste in her two or three days of illness, and the nauseous bitter scarcely existed for her. Then, being in a mood so tender and sore that all the fibers of heart and mind seemed raw, she began to cry a little at her aunt's caresses. "My dear," said the old lady, with a sudden decision, "there is something on your mind. You are fretting about something." Constance peevishly repudiated this idea. Her temper, naturally even and coldly sweet, had, within the last day or two, grown sickly and uncertain. "My dear," repeated the old lady, with gentle but firm insistence, "there is something on your mind. Did you expect—*him* to follow you to town?"

"I don't know," said Constance. "I am not fretting. I am not quite well. That is all."

"No, my dear," said Miss Lucretia, with chirpy firmness; "that is not all." Miss Lucretia was one of those dear old ladies who are slow to receive ideas, but who, hav-

ing by any process absorbed them, hold on to them with marvelous firmness. "You *are* fretting."

"You are very unkind," retorted Constance, who was made more miserable by the fact that she could not honorably confide in anybody, and so allowed her misery to recoil in anger. But she was so palpably unhappy, that Miss Lucretia would not be angry in turn. She only put her withered arms about the beautiful neck, and in spite of a feeble resistance, drew her niece's head to her old bosom and swayed her to and fro a little. "I am ungrateful and wicked, dear aunt," sobbed the girl, easily melted by this voiceless caressing patience. "You are not unkind, are you, dear?" And she looked up with violet eyes full of penitence.

"Why should I be unkind to anybody who is in trouble?" asked Miss Lucretia, still clinging to her point, and seizing the chance of putting it foward again. "I have suffered, and I can sympathize with suffering. Tell me what is the matter." Miss Lucretia was very sentimental, as tender-hearted old maiden ladies mostly are, and she had a wonderful scent for a love-trouble. Now, "Ask me no questions and I tell no lies," is not a proverb of the lofty sort, but it yet holds a word of warning for those who care for wisdom. If you will insist on having the confidence of one who is unwilling to impart it, you ought not in charity to be too amazed if a half-confidence is imposed upon you, or even if you are set upon a wrong scent altogether.

"He might have written," murmured Beauty in distress, suddenly grown double-faced. Miss Lucretia applied this stricture to the conduct of Gerard solely, though, as a matter of fact, in Constance's mind it slid between him and Strange, and was aimed at once at both, and neither.

"Is that all?" said Aunt Lucretia. "You little goose!" She kissed her fair burden patron-like, almost protectingly. The ephithet "little" addressed by Miss Lucretia to Constance was droll. Constance, even whilst laboring under a sense of her own duplicity, smiled furtively. "My dear," said the old lady, "young gentlemen have so many things to think of. And did you not tell me that his father had announced his desire to make his arrangements for your future? I have been making inquiries, my dear, and Mr. Chichester, who knows a great many City people, assures me that the affairs of Lumby and Lumby are colossal. That

was his word, my dear, not mine. Colossal. Now, if the affairs of a House are justly to be described as colossal—and I can repose the most implicit confidence in Mr. Chichester, who would not exaggerate for the world—it will necessarily be a matter of time to make the arrangement which Mr. Lumby suggests; and Gerard is probably quite absorbed in business, and is waiting until he can lay everything before you."

This explanation was so satisfactory to Lucretia, that she dwelt upon it at considerable length, the fact that Lumby and Lumby's affairs were colossal appearing to afford her the warmest gratification. Constance was too glad to be left alone to interrupt her, and she followed the tangled threads of her own thought whilst the old lady expounded the advantages of being attached to an establishment which was colossal, or, as she added savingly, "had been so described by one accustomed to the contemplation of large affairs, and not prone to use the language of exaggeration." So attractive did this theme prove, that Constance escaped all further questioning that night, and made such strenuous efforts to be cheerful, that they resulted in a real headache, which kept her in bed until evening next day, and brought the doctor again. Reginald, calling, encountered the doctor, and asked him what was the matter. The doctor responded in a roundabout way, as doctors sometimes will; but he said enough to make it clear that the case was one for which some suppressed excitement was most probably answerable.

"You had best come no more to Jotunheim, Mr. Strange!" said young Jolly to himself as he walked away sorrowfully. "You have done mischief enough already, Val—mischief enough already. Girls are a sad trouble! I shall be glad to see her safely married to Lumby." Reginald felt a considerable sense of responsibility in this matter, comfortably mingled with a feeling of diplomatic triumph. He it was who had discovered the hitch in affairs and had banished Strange. He felt proud of his own discernment and of the spirit and judgment he had displayed. "Constance will be getting married in a couple of months or so," he told himself, "and Strange will have the good sense to stay away for at least that time. And then Val's such a butterfly fellow! He feels all this very keenly, no doubt; but he'll forget all about it, and as likely as not

bring back a gold-colored bride from the West Indies." Comforted by these reflections, he walked off briskly. The shops were lighted up, and the evening sky was clear. The air even in London had a prophetic sense of spring in it. Where do they come from, those wandering faint perfumed winds which sometimes, for a second merely, greet the sense of the wayfarer in London streets, and how do they keep their perfume in their journey through the city's unnamed odors? Reginald was a lover of the town rather than the country, yet the countrified scent, greeting his nostrils as it passed, sent him on his way well pleased. Suddenly, in the Regent Street crowd one face flashed out on his, and was gone again. He turned and pursued it, but failed to overtake it. "Surely that was Gerard!" he said to himself as he passed and cast an uncertain glance before and behind him. "But what a face the fellow wore! He looked downright ghastly. I hope there's nothing the matter. All his people were well enough. The pace he was going too! Staring straight before him, and plowing on like a madman." A minute later he smiled, and shook his head with a knowing air. "Love's a curious fever. He was going up to Chesterfield, and had heard that Constance was unwell. I'm getting quite knowing about the tender passion. Wonder when my turn's coming? No; nothing in your line to-day, Cupid. Call again." Beguiling time with many naïve reflections, he walked on, and near the top of the Haymarket found himself entangled with a small boy who made a proffer of an evening paper.

"O'ny a 'a'p'ny," said the small boy appealingly, shivering before him as he walked on. "Terrible disaster at sea, sir. Orful failure in the City. O'ny a' a'p'ny!" The words "failure in the City" struck curiously upon his ear, and Gerard's face, seen ten minutes before in Regent Street, came back to him in ridiculous association. He bought a paper chiefly to dispel that absurd fancy, and unfolded it near a tobacconist's window. There he read in large letters "Great City Failure." The words "Lumby and Lumby" followed in some connection, but everything had suddenly grown misty, and he could not see. He stood with a chill sickness creeping over him until his sight cleared again, and then read on: "This afternoon, Messrs. Lumby and Lumby, the well-known merchants of

Gresham Street, suspended payment. The liabilities of the firm are estimated at half a million." The street seemed to whirl, and he could not think. He held the rod of the tobacconist's shop-blind for a minute, and then, with uncertain step, went on again. Nothing was clear to him, within or without. The lights in the shops were hazy, like his thoughts; but out of the fog which seemed to have fallen on the streets came the face of his friend as he had seen it but a while ago, white and haggard and desperate. He could read its meaning now.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LIKE A GHOST REVISITING OLD HAUNTS.

WALKING slowly to his hotel through streets which had a half-awakened air about them, as if they, like himself, had been turning night into day, Mr. Lumby was conscious of a singular sensation. It was as if an elastic cord alternately tightened and relaxed itself within his head. The tightening was terrible; the relaxation brought with it a very remarkable feeling of looseness in the brain, as though it had lost its boundaries. These curious symptoms recurred slowly at first; but after a little time the cord began to tighten and relax itself at an astonishing pace, and this, before he had gone far, resulted in a splitting headache and a general sense of stupefaction. "I have been over-excited," said the merchant to himself as he passed his hand across his forehead, and stood for a moment bareheaded in the chill morning air. "Now I come to think of it, I have been terribly excited. Yes; it has been an exciting time. We have had a near shave, Gerard, a near shave." Rousing himself to a knowledge of the fact that he was standing uncovered in the street, and seeing that a shop-boy had paused in the act of taking down shutters to stare at him, he resumed his hat and walked on. He seemed to take the matter very calmly now, he thought. A minute later last night, and Garling might have been triumphant after all. "Yes," he repeated vaguely, "it was a near shave." The tightening and relaxing cord in his head seemed in some inexplicable way to have got hold of that phrase—"a near shave" with a tug of dreadful pain—a

"near shave" with a sense of dreadful laxness and a loss of the brain's boundaries, as though it were altogether unfenced, and flowed out loose until the tug came and drew it together again with "a near shave" for watchword. He was dimly conscious that this physical condition involved a mental condition which was as unusual as itself. The pain in his head was becoming unbearable by the time he reached the hotel. Boots, again amazed by his appearance at this abnormal hour, asked if he could do anything for him.

"A near shave," said the merchant vaguely.

"Shave, sir?" said the Boots. "Send for barber, sir, d'rec'ly, sir."

"No; never mind that," said Mr. Lumby, awakening as if from a dream of fog with a horrible headache and one persistent phrase in it. "Bring me a cup of tea—strong tea—unusually strong tea."

"Yes, sir," said the Boots; "d'rec'ly, sir." That was Boots's formula. "Looks awful ill," he thought, looking after the merchant. "Odd thing for an elderly cove like him to be out all night two nights running. Ain't it now? And he never was a frisky cove neither—not when he was young." Boots was getting elderly, and remembered Mr. Lumby this many a year, and had an interest in him. He hurried off now for the tea, and was curious or interested enough—not having much upon his hands just then—to see it made and to volunteer to take it up himself. He was a sort of idealized Boots, and had two other actual Boots beneath him. His function at his present time of life consisted chiefly in telling the way to everywhere, the cab fare to everywhere, and the time of starting of all trains at all stations—an occupation purely intellectual, and making large demands on the mental resources. Mr. Lumby, in the eyes of Boots, was as important a person as a prime minister, if indeed a prime minister could have come into measurable distance with him. The head of a great City house, member of Parliament for his county, who might have been Lord Mayor as often as Dick Whittington if he had chosen, was necessarily a figure in that old-fashioned City hostel, where his father and grandfather were remembered as guests before him. Boots found the great man sitting on the bed, and noticed that he looked not only ill, but bewildered.

"Excuse me, sir," said the Boots; "you ain't like yourself at all, sir. Shall I pull your boots off, sir?" He was down upon his knees at this task at once. "Can't ha' been a-drinking?" he thought, looking up at the venerable face above him. "Been a-watching by a sick-bed," he concluded, charitably; "that's more likely. That's where he's brought that troubled look from."

"Give me the tea, if you please," said the merchant with a sudden awakening look. "I have a very bad headache. Boots!"

"Yes, sir."

"I have business," said the great man rising, tea-cup in hand, speaking and looking a little vacantly, "important business at—I have business"—he was bright and clear again—"at ten o'clock. I have time for an hour's sleep. Call me in an hour, and bring me another cup of strong tea. And I will take a hot bath." He drank the tea, and passed his hand across his eyes; then knitting his fingers, pressed both palms heavily against his forehead, and in that attitude walked twice or thrice across the room and back again. "In an hour's time, Boots," he added, as that functionary was about to close the door—"not later."

Being left alone, he partly undressed, and wrapping himself in a warm dressing-gown, stretched himself on the bed, and almost instantly fell asleep. So profound was his brief slumber, that when at the end of an hour Boots returned and, beginning to make preparations for the bath, awoke him, Lumby found it difficult to believe that he had been left to himself more than a minute. It cost him a severe effort to rise; and no sooner was he erect again, than the cord within his head began once more to tighten and relax itself, and the aching sense of stupefaction returned. But a bath, a complete change of clothing, and another cup of strong tea, made no bad substitutes for a night's sleep, and he went out refreshed to meet Garling. Looking back at the condition into which he had fallen on first entering the street, nearly two hours before, he felt some alarm—of a retrospective sort—at the symptoms. "It was no wonder," he said as he walked briskly on, trying to forget his headache or to walk beyond it. "The strain had been very terrible." He was yet too near the edge of the precipice to dare to think much of the terrors he had escaped from. "A little more of that," he told himself,

"and I might have gone mad. I must be very cool and wary of excitement now."

He reached the offices, and walked in square and upright If he had been closely noticed, it would have been seen that his eyes were filmy, and that the flushed color of his skin was of a different hue from that healthy redness of complexion which his face commonly wore, proof of a pure life and a good digestion. It wanted a few minutes of the hour, and there were but one or two of the clerks yet arrived. These, as the chief went squarely along nodding here and there, noticed nothing unusual in him. Nor did any one observe any especial change in Garling when, two or three minutes later, and punctual to his hour as ever, he paced slowly in, with his hands behind him and his furtive eyes bent downward.

Garling had not meant to be here again. He was not an imaginative man by conscious practice, but no man ever had great mental powers without the imaginative faculty being in strong force amongst them, and Garling felt like a ghost revisiting old haunts. He did not greatly care about being defeated, and he thought that curious. It was in remarkable contradiction to his sense of almost absolute indifference that when, in the course of dressing after his employer's departure, he had made preparations for shaving, he was compelled to huddle away his razors and look them up, in a sudden terror-stricken distrust of his own will. It would be too powerful a temptation—not to *him*, for his indifference astonished him—to his hand. That, he noticed as a phenomenon hitherto unobserved, or, until now, outside his experience, and thought it would be psychologically interesting to know if suicides were ever committed in that mood and manner. Once or twice, as a matter of mere theory, and not as has having much relation to himself, he wondered whether Lumby had left him any loophole of escape. He had left him two hours alone. What might have been done in two hours? To resecure his fraudulent gains, nothing. To escape?—he had nothing to escape from. His personal liberty was guaranteed already, under certain conditions. One of them was that he should present himself at the offices at ten o'clock. He went thither automatically, with the sense of a ghostly revisiting of old scenes and resumption of old habits accompanying him and growing upon him all the way. He had been

sleepless for two nights, and had a feeling of dreaming awake, and of walking in an atmosphere of nightmare, which might take shape at any moment in such forms as only the dreadful hollows of dark night can hold.

And so, almost exhausted on either side, the two combatants met again. On Garling's entrance, Mr. Lumby arose and locked the door. He had waited in the room which the cashier had always used; and now resuming the seat from which Garling's coming had disturbed him, he waved his hand to another on the opposite side of the table. It was the seat the regular occupant had been in the habit of offering to visitors. The cashier had an oddly vivid feeling as he took it, of being now a stranger in the place. There was no bitterness or defeat in this: it tickled him a little, and he suppressed a smile. He was puzzled to define the humor of the situation, but it was there, none the less. Lumby, for his part, between the racking headache which had again attacked him, and the sleepy stupor which dwelt on all his faculties, had to make an effort to decide within himself for what purpose he had called Garling there. There was silence for the space of perhaps half a minute.

"One thing was omitted when we parted this morning," said the merchant, coldly, having regained the lost thread of his thoughts. "I have your written confession here, and your statement of the funds which lie in your name at the bank of Madrid. I want now your order for the transference of those funds to the Bank of England, to be placed there to the credit of the House."

"The sum is a large one," said Garling, "and they will more easily meet the demand if it be made by installments. Say fifty thousand now, and fifty thousand fortnightly afterward, until the whole is withdrawn."

"Say weekly," said the merchant.

"Very well," returned Garling.

"I shall require you to accompany me to the bank, and to have inquiries wired to their agents in Madrid."

"Very well," said Garling again.

"Your being here this morning is a proof that you recognize the futility of any attempt to escape until your restoration is completed. Your only safety lies in obedience. My pledge will not operate a moment beyond your failure or rebellion."

"I understand," responded Garling.

"Prepare the necessary drafts,' said the merchant, rising, "and bring them to me. Before I leave you, surrender your keys. Be ready to accompany me to the Bank by midday." Garling produced his keys, and suppressing an inclination to fling them on the table, laid them gravely down. Where was the use of a demonstration of rebellion when he was bound body and soul? Mr. Lumby took them up, unlocked the drawer in which he had placed Garling's confession, withdrew that document, and placed it in the safe, the cashier watching him all the while with wicked furtiveness. Next the merchant laid a heavy hand upon the bell. "Ask Mr. Barnes to come to me," he said to the messenger who answered to the summons. After a short pause, enter Mr. Barnes, a placid but keen-looking man, with a frame of wiry white hair about a healthy-hued face, and calm gray eyes which looked through gold-rimmed spectacles. "Mr. Barnes," said the merchant. Mr. Barnes bowed ever so slightly. "You will take your place in this room, if you please, until you receive further instructions. Attend to these matters in the first instance," —waving a hand toward the heaped documents and letters on the table—"and take to-day the general direction of affairs. The matter need not at present be mentioned, but Mr. Garling has ceased to hold any connection with the firm."

Mr. Barnes was like one thunderstruck by this intelligence. If he had been told that Jupiter had ceased to have any connection with the planetary system, it could not have hit him harder. And in that supposititious case there would have been the refuge of unbelief to fall back upon, whilst here he was bound not to question for a moment. It was not a specified part of the merchant's undertaking with the cashier that his crime should be kept a secret, but there were many reasons which made that seem advisable. Lumby's own self-esteem went strongly in that direction, and the firm had not been accustomed to the employment of fraudulent servants. His pride in the probity of the House seemed smirched by this associate villainy, and he was not wishful to spread such a sentiment in other minds. The temporarily appointed cashier being left to his own amazement, came out of it gradually, with the general verdict of—of something wrong somewhere.

"Is it your desire that I should send for the necessary

forms or myself apply for them?" asked Garling, addressing Mr. Lumby, in his ordinary business tone.

"As you please," he answered. "But be ready to accompany me at noon. You will open the letters and attend to general business matters, Mr. Barnes." The merchant withdrew into his own room, and closed the sliding panel. "Safe," he thought, "quite safe now;" and reaching with something of a blinded groping motion for a chair, he sat down and turned himself to the table. How horribly his head ached. It was well he had been able to keep a clear mind so far, and carry the situation through to this point. Thinking of what the consequences might have been, but for his seemingly accidental resolve to impeach Garling without waiting for further discoveries, he half started from his chair once or twice. That awful cord was tightening and loosening in his head again, and he could scarcely see for pain. An hour or two more and he would be free to rest. The excitement had been too much for him, and he would go back to the hotel and sleep it off. Sleep was all he wanted. The strain had been more than he knew of at the time, and he was not so young as he had been. Thinking thus, he sat with his arms lying heavily on the table, and with his head depending downward heavily. More and more leaden grew the weight of pain, and at length his head drooped on his arms, and he fell asleep once more.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A MESSENGER FROM THE BANK.

GARLING meanwhile was in the street, walking to the Bank. To be free as he was and yet bound as he was, seemed an anomaly. He was going to surrender all his evil gains, and he was no worse nor better off than if he had lived a life of honesty, except in the estimation of men for whom he had no regard. The physical conditions were perhaps answerable for a part of his indifference. He was too worn out to feel keenly.

The usual greetings met him as he walked, and he responded to them in his usual way, by bending his bent head a little lower. Eminent capitalists remarked that morn-

ing that Garling was looking worn, and afterward speaking in the light of the latter events, called upon other eminent capitalists to corroborate their assertions that they *had* made that observation. With no change in his common business manner, Garling secured the necessary forms, and returning, filled them up at his own table, sitting in the visitor's chair and facing the wonder-stricken Mr. Barnes. Every now and then the promoted officer glanced at the resigned or—dismissed? Surely that last was impossible. Garling the long-headed, Garling the keen, the imperious, a match for any ten cashiers and managers in the city for acumen and knowledge of the world, the pearl of business men dismissed? *Im*possible. And Garling's manner set that thought at rest. He was just the same as ever, except that he had been used to be always so busy, and was now, by way of added wonder, idle.

When he had filled up the necessary forms and had everything ready for the merchant's inspection and use, he took up the daily paper which lay upon the table and feigned to read it. So far as he was concerned it was an idle feigning, for he scarcely had the heart to read a word, but he sat there with stupendous patience and self-control and made no sign. Mr. Barnes was evidently agitated by extreme curiosity; and Garling, though he had no particular purpose in foiling him, yet found the baffling of that curiosity a help to him. It whiled away the time, and suited the purposeless weary venom of his mood to sit there impassive and worry Barnes, and occasionally to meet Barnes's secret glance of wonder with one of keen discovery, and to make him uncomfortable in that way. But the fire of Remorse, which in some hearts is only to be lighted by failure, was already in this pause beginning to burn in him, and to bring him a foretaste of its agonies. He had failed! In the very hour of his triumph he had failed! There was nine years' work wasted—thrown away. On the very results of his fraud, the great House would prosper, for he had worked for its prosperity that he might make his fraud the larger. Let him care as little as he might, let him be as indifferent as he would, it was ignominious. He had failed.

Failure is always bitter, but it is ten times bitter to the detected rogue. And now his own ingratitude began to gnaw at him; a crime spurned by his steel-armed con-

science this nine years past, crept in through a crevice in the shattered armor and began to gnaw at him. And shame wreathed a first cold coil about his heart and sickened him. Then one thought suddenly took him by the very soul. This vengeance came upon him through his desertion of his wife and child, and one crime was made a whip to scourge another. *Was* the world a chaos of chances, after all, if such a thing as this could be? It was clear that Lumby had overheard the colloquy between that insolent Yankee and himself; clear that this had excited suspicion in his mind; clear that he had that night disturbed the ledger which held the account of Garling's first year of stewardship, and so had detected him. This heaped bitterness on bitterness, and set the sting of his long-deadened conscience to bite deeper. Bah! Why distress himself about that world-old superstition, long since destroyed by philosophy, and contemned by common sense? Yet he could not shake off the fear, and it dug at the foundations of all his strength; for if it were truly founded, he had thrown away more than a rare plot and lost more than a great fortune.

Twelve o'clock at last.

"Mr. Barnes," said Garling, with an unconscious use of his old habit of command, "be so good as to tell Mr. Lumby that it is midday, and that I am ready for him."

Mr. Barnes, with an unconscious use of his old habit of obedience, arose and tapped at the sliding panel. No answer. He tried to thrust it on one side; but the bolt was fastened. He rapped again, more loudly. No answer. He went round to the side-door and rapped at that, and still receiving no response, essayed to open it, but discovered that it also was fastened.

"He must have gone out," said Barnes, returning, "but I did not hear him."

"Nor did I," returned Garling. So that he performed his share of the contract, what did it matter to him whether the merchant kept his or left it unkept? If he chose to be ruined, let him be ruined. He would want money at the Bank soon enough, unless Garling were mistaken, and that could not come about very easily. The new cashier and the old sat on together until the luncheon hour, when Mr. Barnes went out. At two o'clock he returned, and sat

down before a new pile of letters. One of these he handed to Garling.

"This concerns you, Mr. Garling," he said. It was Garling's roundabout note to Lumby, returned by the Liverpool firm as having been inclosed to them in error. "Clumsy fool!" said Garling to himself, not taking time to think that it mattered no longer. "Why not have sent it straight on without inclosing it?" Then he smiled bitterly at his own want of apprehension, and absently tore the useless fraud across and threw it into the waste-paper basket. This futile reminder of all his futile plans stung him a little. There were strings enough within him, but he would not writhe. Mr. Barnes was looking to see whether this odd note had any effect on Garling, but the defrauder held himself and gave no sign. When men came to know that he was defeated, they should have no chance to say that they had seen him shaken by defeat.

Another hour went by, and Mr. Barnes, at Garling's bidding, again rapped at the sliding panel, and again tried both it and the door with no result. A new alarm was presenting itself to Garling. It was patent that if matters went too far, and the firm was shaken, the promise of immunity he held might after all avail him little. He sat thinking uneasily of this for another half-hour, and had almost resolved to rise and batter at the door until he received an answer—for he was certain that the merchant had fallen asleep within—when a clerk came hurriedly up announcing the arrival of a messenger from the Bank, who wished to see either Mr. Lumby himself or Mr. Garling on business of importance. Nobody could guess how enormously important that business was half so well as Garling. The ruin he had planned might be coming on already—might well have begun even now, and if it fell whilst he was in England, nothing could save him. The power would have passed from his employer's hands, and the promise he had given would not be worth a straw.

"Anybody in Number Thirteen?" asked Garling.

"No, sir," said the clerk who had brought the message.

"Then show the messenger in there."

Garling went to meet the Bank messenger. The tale he had to tell was brief. The account of the firm was enormously overdrawn, and checks to a large amount, bearing the firm's signature, had been passed in—fortunately not

presented for payment. Certain promissory notes also were falling due. "We pay in fifty thousand pounds this afternoon," said Garling. "Mr. Lumby is in town, and had made arrangements to meet me at noon to-day for that purpose. We shall follow you at once."

"We were surprised, sir, at the great drafts you have been making lately."

"No doubt," said Garling—"no doubt. Had there been any great stress, Mr. Lumby would have transferred a portion of his private account. We shall follow directly."

The messenger withdrew smilingly. There was no doubt about Lumby and Lumby. The senior partner's private account, swollen year by year for many years past, was enough to show their solidity. Still, if Garling could act so recklessly as this, there was at least room for other business men to gain a little credit for themselves. There was some comfort in thinking that Garling was not quite immaculate. For one moment, when the messenger had gone, Garling stood with a diabolical rebellion in his heart and eyes. Fate forced him to rescue the firm for his own sake, but he had well-nigh courage and hate enough to risk his own ruin and let crash the falling House. No! There were still chances in the world even for him. He walked swiftly to the door of Lumby's room and rained down blows upon its panels with his clinched hand. Mr. Barnes came running into the corridor to ask what was the matter, and Garling, seeing that he carried a heavy ruler, took it from him and made a very storm of noise. A voice answered from within, and the head of the firm, looking, to Mr. Barnes's wild astonishment, like a drunken man, threw open the door. Garling entered the room, closed the door in his successor's face, and accosted his late employer.

"Be quick, or you will be too late. A messenger from the Bank has been here to say that the firm's account is overdrawn, with heavy demands to meet." Crossing the room, he shot back the bolt, and threw open the sliding panel. "Mr. Barnes," he said, cool and calm as ever, "oblige me by sending for a hansom. At once, if you please." The astounded Barnes, once more shut out by the returning of the panel, rang the bell and transmitted Garling's order. The merchant facing Garling looked dazed and overwhelmed with sleep. "I have everything in

readiness," said the ex-cashier. "Come with me—there is not a minute to lose."

Lumby looked stupidly at his watch. "A quarter to four," he said heavily. "What is the matter?"

"Come with me," repeated Garling. "Compose yourself. If you go to the bank with such an air as this, the town will declare you bankrupt. You look it." He spoke with quiet scorn, not hurried by the pressure of events or swayed out of his usual possession of himself.

"I have been asleep," said the merchant. "What's the matter?"

"Ruin is the matter!" cried Garling, stirred at last. Barnes in the next room heard those awful unbelievable words, and dropped into his chair white as a ghost. "Come with me, and wake up by the way." If they were late, Garling would not set his liberty at a pin's fee. The merchant, looking weakly round, took up his hat with a shaking hand and began to draw on his gloves.

"Have you the drafts made out?" he asked.

"Yes," said Garling, thrusting them upon him with both hands. "Come!" There was a horrible impatience on him now, and a fear lest they should lose the hour. He had to stifle this hurry and dread, whilst he walked behind Lumby through the offices. The merchant's aspect awakened surmises among the clerks, and it was told afterward how his hands shook and how pale he was. A hansom was standing already at the door, and they both entered. Garling gave his instructions to the driver; the man touched his horse with his whip, and they started.

"There is ample time," said the merchant to himself, consulting his watch again. "I could walk to the bank in less than the time we have." His face lost its flushed and excited look, and the old expression came back into his eyes. He drew himself together and crossed his arms upon his breast, holding in his right hand the documents which meant recovered fortune and an unsoiled name. As his mind began to play again, he fathomed the reason of Garling's urgency. "A curious situation," he said almost complacently. "Was ever scoundrel so anxious to disgorge before?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I AM AFRAID, SIR, IT IS TALKED ABOUT."

CHEAPSIDE was unusually crowded that afternoon, and both men being eager to get on, the impediments to traffic exaggerated themselves, and became irritating. Garling lifted the little trap in the roof of the cab and snarled at the driver "Drive!" The driver, being also irritated by the obstacles he met, snarled back at him, and picking his way among cabs, omnibuses, and wagons, cast loose anathemas right and left, as boys throw crackers. In a little time they got behind an omnibus, and the driver being compelled to adapt his speed to that of the vehicle before him, broke in a wordy hail-storm on the conductor, who, turning upon him a smiling visage, winked slowly and laboriously, and condescended no other answer. The cabman, naturally incensed, slanged him with all the eloquence of wrath. The omnibus stopped to pick up a stout old lady; and the conductor, taking advantage of the pause, addressed the driver of the hansom with smooth satire: "You shouldn't want to take the bread out of poor folks' mouths, your R'yal Highness. Get down, and let the cabman drive. He's used to it."

Garling looked up at the sound of the voice, and saw Hiram Search. Hiram, beaming all over with the consciousness of his own humor, caught Garling's eye at that moment, and raised his hat to him with a genial flourish. Lumby sat back in the cab with his arms across his breast, trying to be calm, but relapsing into his old flurried condition—anxious to be in time. The 'bus got into motion again, and the cab followed slowly, the cabman swearing as terribly as, according to Captain Shandy, our army did in Flanders. Hiram, with much apparent interest, demanded to know where he preached on Sundays; and winked at Garling, as if to ask him what he thought of *that*, in the way of genteel repartee. There was almost nothing but the horse's length between Garling and the destroyer of his plans, and to see him there thus insolently gleeful and familiar, was more than gall and wormwood. The 'bus be-

ing pulled up very suddenly, the cab-horse's nose almost entered at the window. "Going to Whitechapel?" asked Hiram of the driver, sweetly. "Don't keep us waiting. Get in, sir, get in. We'll take care of you," Having delivered himself of this sally, he winked again at Garling, who was by this time half mad with rage, and only held himself in by a supreme effort.

"Hiram!" cried a faint pleading voice from the pavement, and a hand touched the conductor's arm as he swung by his strap, inspecting the crowd with a knowing eye, as if he were choosing prize passengers. He turned, and there was Mary, looking pale and frightened, and bearing on her face the mark of recent tears. Hiram rang his bell to stop the omnibus, and leaped to the pavement. Garling saw the little figure also, and maddened, feeling that his dead wife's vengeance was indeed beginning, in spite of her forgiveness. But a second later, or less, the sight of the little satchel Mary carried in her hand banished all other things from his mind. He had until that moment forgotten it as completely as though it had been of no value. The shock of detection, the struggle for self-mastery, the shame and rage which had crowded on him since he had felt his employer's arresting and accusing hand, had left no room for the thought of minor troubles.

"What is it?" cried Hiram, bending over the worn face. "What is it?"

"He has left me!" she answered. "The house is locked." Her lips were trembling; and he, forgetting where he stood, took both her hands in his, and felt them cold. "I don't know where to go. He said we were going to Southampton, and he put me in the train, and left me."

"Left you!" cried Hiram. "Why, there he is!"

"Where?" she asked, shrinking to him as if from some imagined fear.

At that moment Garling's hand was laid upon the satchel. "Give this to me!" he said hoarsely. "Go home—go home!" She held tightly to the bag; but he wrenched it from her hand, and returned to the cab. "Drive on!" he cried with a terrible execration, standing behind the splash-board and facing the driver. The cabman shook his head up and down with a countenance in which mute appeal against the unreasonableness of this direction was blent with scorn and pity.

"What is all this?" asked Lumby, as Garling threw himself into the seat again.

"What is it?" mocked Garling, gnashing at him. "Ask what it was to-morrow."

Lumby looked at him with scornful wonder, not unmixed with fear. "We shall be late," he said. "Had we not better walk?"

They left the cab together; and Garling snarled to the driver to go to the office for payment, and strove, whilst Lumby held his arm, to struggle through the crowd. But the crowd had on a sudden grown dense. There was a deadlock in the horseway, and on the footpath the people were crushed together looking at it. The beginning of anger, as the wise men said, is like the letting in of waters, and Garling was now fairly raging. Having once begun to surrender his self-control, he became for the moment helpless to control himself at all, and struggled like a madman. At last they reached the limits of the crowd, and found a straight course before them; when suddenly, loud and clear clanged out the clock of Bow Church, striking the hour. At that they turned pale faces on each other, and Lumby released Garling's arm. The great bell of Paul's followed, booming above the roar of the street and the general babel of sound only for the ears that waited for it. And in both minds the same imagined sight was present; each saw the image of a closing bank door.

"It will be known before nightfall," panted Lumby, fixing his haggard eyes on Garling in wild accusation.

"Why should it?" he responded. "You have everything in hand, and it will be a passing stroke at the worst. Be at the bank by ten o'clock in the morning."

The merchant turned, thrusting the drafts into his breast-pocket, and walked back, with bent head, despondent face, and heavy heart; and his mechanical steps led him to the offices. It was not a difficult thing for Garling to hang behind and lose his late employer for a moment in the crowd. He was absent from the merchant's thoughts, and that made the task still easier. And having lost him for a moment, it was the easiest thing in the world to slip into a hansom cab outside the block and drive away. Ample need to drive away, as matters stood. For a whisper once started in the city, would swell ere long into a roar, and in that roar he could already hear in fancy his own name. He

would be gone before the storm could burst. The House would weather it easily enough, and within his grinding teeth he banned the House. But his own crimes would be known, and his defeat. There was the sting he dreaded. Before *that*, he was a coward. He could have borne to be spoken of as a successful scoundrel; but to be pointed at as a detected rogue, compelled to resign his booty, and then scornfully dismissed, would have been unendurable, *was* unendurable to think of, and had yet to be endured.

There was whispering and putting of heads together in the offices of Lumby and Lumby. Barnes sat in Garling's seat, and there was a look of amazed misery upon his face which struck all who saw him there. The head of the firm had been locked in his own room all day; and after the coming of the bank messenger, he had gone out tremulous and fevered, and had returned as if from a fruitless errand, hanging his head, and looking like a ghost. Garling, even the impenetrable Garling, had looked worn and gray. There was a vague suspicion as to what these portents might mean, which filled the very air, and made the whisperings needless to carry it from mind to mind. And, to set on all surmise the seal of dreadful certainty, it was known somehow before five o'clock by everybody in the place, down to the very messengers, that just before the closing of the bank a check had been presented and returned with the statement that there were no effects to meet it. The flying Garling might well have foreseen this last disaster. But not everybody in the place knew of this open shame to the old craft which had weathered so many storms and sailed triumphantly through so much evil weather since it had launched one hundred and thirty years ago. Not the master of the ship. No man told him as yet of that disaster. He sat alone, separated from the grieving, faithful Barnes, only by the sliding panel of corrugated glass. The time for departure had gone by; but Barnes waited, fain to offer consolation, if he had but dared, or known how to offer it. At length he went round by the corridor and tapped humbly at the door. "Come in," cried the merchant, in a dejected voice, and Barnes entered.

"What are your instructions for to-morrow, sir?" asked Barnes.

"You will hold the same place," returned his employer, looking up at him with a withered smile. "You may consider yourself promoted permanently. Where is Garling?" he asked suddenly, rising with a startled air.

"Mr. Garling has not returned," answered Barnes, "since you and he went out an hour ago."

"Not returned!" said Lumby, taking one quick step forward and halting suddenly. "No matter. Mr. Barnes!"

"Yes; sir."

"We will go through matters to-morrow, and I shall have to place some confidences in you, which I shall rely upon you to respect."

Barnes's heart ached. Was it possible Lumby did not know that the expected crash was the town's talk already.

"We have passed through a grave crisis, which has left almost everything disarranged, and there will be work to do for weeks to come. We will talk of these things to-morrow. I have had a time of great anxiety, and I am tired."

Barnes's face brightened, and he said eagerly, "You will be able to put things straight again, sir?"

The merchant looked at him wonderingly. "What do *you* know about this matter, Mr. Barnes?" There was no one to hear their talk, but by instinct he closed the door.

"The check presented at the Bank last thing this afternoon, sir. It is talked about already. I am told that Rawlings & Co., relying on the name of the firm, got it cashed privately after it was refused by the Bank. They were always very questionable people, sir, Rawlings & Co."

"The check," said the merchant, "refused this afternoon? Why, what is this?"

"Is it possible that you don't know, sir?" cried Barnes. "Rawlings was paid by check yesterday—two, five, five, odd. The check was presented this afternoon, and the Bank returned it, marked, 'No effects.' I am afraid, sir, it is talked about."

Lumby strode up and down the room, deeply moved by this discovery. "This is bad news, Barnes," he said, "bad news. I had hoped to escape anything of that sort. But it will be all right to-morrow. Be here at the usual time in the morning. If you hear any rumor against the solidity of the firm, I authorize you to offer the fullest and roundest denial. Do you hear? The fullest and roundest

denial. You shall know all to-morrow. I am too fatigued to attend to business now. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," returned Barnes, and went his way, lifted up in spirit, but still puzzled. "If he heard any rumor"—so ran the merchant's words. Rumor? There was no rumor, but a downright clamant roar, and wherever Barnes went he heard it. Wherever he heard it, he denied it; as a matter of personal knowledge, he denied it; being personally in the full confidence of the firm, he assured assailants right and left that there was nothing in it. And as when wind and tide go contrary ways there is a greater tumult than when both go together, this authoritative contradiction made the roar the louder, and spread it wider.

Lumby, left alone, raised his face toward the skylight in a sort of passionate exultation and triumph for a moment, and dropped it again in anguish. The House was saved; Heaven had been merciful, villainy had been discomfited, and the House was saved; but the good old name was soiled. The British merchant found a doubt upon his name as intolerable as the ermine finds a spot upon his fur. Never a breath upon the name until to-day, and now it was soiled—soiled! How could the return of a check from such a house fail to be talked of? That awful cord began to tighten and loosen in his brain again, and his eyes grew hot and his hands clammy. He entered the cashier's room, intending to place the drafts in the safe, and then go home to his hotel and send for a physician. But having opened the safe, the confession Garling had written lay before him, and he must needs take it up and look at the rogue's balance-sheet at the end. From it he referred to the drafts, to see if between them they made up the sum set down there. Next, after standing for a while irresolute, he drew the gigantic ledger from its place, and laying it on the table, turned to the leaf on which he had first fixed the fraud, and compared the penciled marks he had made upon the margin with Garling's first entry. The two exactly tallied. He stooped above the book a moment, holding the drafts and the confession in his hands, then dropped them on the broad ruled leaves, and knitting his fingers, pressed both palms above his forehead, and took a step or two across the room and back again. There was a hunted feeling in his mind, a hurry

and confusion, a dim sense that any moment might bring shipwreck, that there were things to do, which, being done, would avert all chance of mischief; but like a man in a nightmare, he could only grope in thought, and everything was blind and dark. What was the fear that threatened him? Where was the way of safety? If this hideous pain would only let him think a while! He reeled a little, and stretching out hands, caught one side of the great ledger and steadied himself by it. The cord in his head was growing tenser, and the fear that followed him drew nearer. Tenser grew the cord, tenser, tenser, until at last it snapped, and the merchant, with one blind stagger sideways, closed the ledger with unconscious hands and fell huddled on the floor.

CHAPTER XXX.

SHORN OF WEALTH AND SHORN OF ALL.

THE strong spring sunshine lay, at random broadcast, on sea and shore, and the great spring wind came roaring like the voice of a lusty giant. There was scarce a cloud in the sky, and scarce a cloud in happy Gerard's mind. Stout Roland, feeling the spring in his veins, caracoled hither and thither with arched neck and mincing feet; and Gerard felt all the horse's joy, and in the pauses of the ride lifted up his voice and sung for gladness, at the eager wind and the wide sunshine and the hope of half an hour hence. He was riding to see Constance, and that of itself was enough; and besides, Gerard was one of those men to whom riding is the most delightful of all physical pleasures. So, with Roland curveting and prancing and making a mighty pretense of scorn at all things—with a tender measured fineness in every motion the while—Gerard came up to the lodge-gates of the Grange, and called for the lodge-keeper with a voice of jollity. Out she came, shading her eyes from the bright light, an old woman, who had kept the lodge for the old family.

"They be all gone to town, Muster Lumby," said the old woman.

"Gone to town?" repeated Gerard in a voice of disbelief.

"Yes, sir," said the old lady, "all the family."

Gerard sat without reply for one dismal minute, and then turned away.

A happy lover, who has come
To look on her that loves him well,
Who lights and rings the gate-way bell,
And learns her gone and far from home.

He saddens; all the magic light
Dies off at once from bower and hall,
And all the place is dark, and all
The chambers emptied of delight.

He hung his head on the way back. There was no pleasure in the keen wind and bright sunshine on the homeward ride. Home reached, he found a note, just delivered by one of the Grange servants. It came from Constance, and ran thus:

"DEAR GERARD,—My father and Reginald are both going to town, and since I can not be left in this great house alone, I am to go with them, and be taken to my aunt Lucretia's. You will not forget to write to me. We shall be away for at least a week. Yours truly,

"CONSTANCE."

The note was cool enough, but all Constance's missives had been cool, and so Gerard felt the absence of no accustomed warmth. Yet none the less the brief iciness chilled him, and he was puzzled by the command to write, and by the absence of an address to write to. This was the first he had heard of Aunt Lucretia, and he knew no more of her whereabouts than the note told him. He had a reticence about writing to Constance through her father, whose address he knew; and he felt, with a proud sense of undeserved injury, that if she had of purpose aforethought omitted her address, he would wait until she sent it to him. The bright spring hours began to go heavily. Val Strange had mysteriously disappeared, and Gerard was lonely and altogether ill at ease, until on Thursday morning came a telegram from the office of the firm, under the hand of Mr. Barnes: "Please come to town by first train. Make no delay."

"Your father has been away four days, Gerard," said Mr. Lumby, "and has never written me a line. That is

very unusual, and it makes me a little anxious. You must tell him to write at once."

The call to town revived Gerard's spirits. He was going to have a fortune put into his hands, and that meant freedom to marry as soon as Constance could be persuaded.

"All right, mother," he answered lightly, kissing her. "I won't forget. Good-bye, Milly. Get ready," he added with a compound smile, in which a most hang-dog aspect blended comically with a beaming joyousness—"get ready for your orange blossoms." Milly nodded gayly from the hall; the young fellow got into the dog-cart beside the groom, and waving his hand, drove away. Pleasant thoughts were with him on his journey, and his spirits seemed to leap the higher for their late depression, as a branch released swings upward. His little bitterness about Constance was all dispelled; and as he rode through London streets toward the offices, he whistled like the mavis. Looks are not easy to define, or Gerard might have read pity in the face of the very porter at the doors, and pity again in the face of elderly Johnson at his desk.

"Good-morning, Johnson," said Gerard, cheerily. "Is my father here?"

"No, sir," said the old clerk. "Mr. Lionel and Mr. George are upstairs."

Mr. Lionel and Mr. George were the junior partners, Gerard's cousins. There was a marked sadness on the old man's brow, and a melancholy quaver in his voice.

"How glum you Londoners are, Johnson," said the young fellow. "Why, if you meet a plowman in the country you hear him whistling—out of tune, most likely, but still whistling. They catch the habit from the birds, perhaps. But all you people look as if you were assisting at a funeral."

"This way, sir," said Johnson. "Allow me." He led the way upstairs, turning half round to Gerard with a respectful bend. In the room which had been Garling's, sat Mr. Barnes and the junior partners.

"Good-day, George," said Gerard, cheerily. "Good-day, Lionel. How d'ye do, Barnes? All here to help *me* into El Dorado, I suppose. Where's the governor?"

The cousins shook hands with him solemnly, and Barnes bowed with saddened visage.

"Well, upon my word," said Gerard, looking from one

to the other, "you're a cheerful lot, to be sure!" As he looked, his own face caught something of the shadow which lay on theirs.

"Sit down," said his cousin Lionel. "We are in trouble here. Mr. Barnes, tell him all you know."

"First of all," said Gerard, anxiously, looking from one to another, "where is my father?"

"At his hotel," said Cousin George. "He is not well; in fact, he is seriously unwell; but don't be afraid for him. Sit down. Tell what you know, Barnes."

At that, Barnes told all he knew, as we know it already; and Gerard listened amazed, almost beyond amazement.

"In the course of the evening," pursued Barnes, "I met Mr. Lionel and Mr. George. They had heard of the unfortunate circumstance of the check, and I gave them your father's assurance that everything would be right to-day. We were all naturally anxious, and we arranged to meet here at nine o'clock this morning—an hour earlier than usual. Mr. Lionel and Mr. George will tell you that they called at your father's hotel, and could hear no news of him."

"I called," said Lionel, breaking in gravely, "at Garling's place, to see if he knew anything. They told me he was away—the people at the shop beneath the rooms he lived in—he had gone away with a lady on Tuesday night."

"With a lady?" cried Gerard.

"A young lady," returned Cousin Lionel. "He had taken an extra room for her some days before, and spoke of her as his daughter. She called him her father, and their joint story was credited."

Gerard sunk back in his chair, feeling like a man in a nightmare.

Barnes went on with his story, from which it appeared that the three, reaching the offices at the appointed hour, found the night-porter and his wife in a terrible flutter of alarm and excitement, having two hours before discovered the head of the firm insensible upon the floor of that room.

"It was probably providential," said Barnes, in conclusion, "that, in falling, he had slightly wounded himself, and had lost a little blood. I am bound to say that the watchman and his wife seem to have acted with great promptitude. The man ran at once for a surgeon. Your father was removed to his hotel, a physician was sent for, and

everything that skill could suggest had been done before our arrival."

Gerard saw despair confronting him, and but an hour ago he had been so happy.

"We have done what we could here," said George Lumby, rising and folding his arms across a burly chest. "We have turned over the whole of our private balances to the credit of the firm. That is but a drop in the ocean," he added, sorrowfully; "but"—lifting his head and striding across the room—"it may help us after all."

"We conjecture," said Lionel, "that your father knows something *we* do not know, and we think that if we can tide over a day or two, he may save us. George and I have given instructions to realize on all stock we hold, and we *may* make a stand. But the check yesterday, and Garling's flight, and your father's sudden illness, have an ugly look. We are talked about everywhere, and we expect to be pressed. The small fry have been at us already, and have been paid. We shall stand out as long as we can.

The very prosperity of the firm had led the partners to their ruin. It had been so profitable to pour their profits anew into that great reservoir, that they had invested but little outside it, and now the treasures of the reservoir had sunk, as into some great subterranean cavern.

All day the ominous City talk went on, and men spoke of the great House as doomed. It was believed that Garling had got away with prodigious sums, and so his pre-eminence amongst keen fellows remained undisputed still. There were some adventurous spirits who were willing to take long odds against the breakage of the firm; and sportive clerks offered the market betting on the event, as if it had been a sort of City Derby. Once that day the firm was hit hard; and the junior partners took up a great bill of which, until then, they had known nothing, and waited with what stoicism they had for the next blow to fall. Gerard, feeling as if his heart had been one great ache, sat down and wrote a letter to his mother, disguising from her the ills that had befallen, and striving to write lightly, whilst his heart sunk over every word like lead. "Do not expect to hear from either of us for a day or two," he wrote, "for we are most prodigiously busy, and have no news which you unbusiness-like country people would care to hear."

Mrs. Lumby, reading this next day, took it for a jocular affectation of the cares of commerce worn for her amusement by the new partner, and she and Milly had a laugh over it. But a day or two actually going by, and she hearing no more, she wired a message of inquiry to the offices.

"You must answer it," said George Lumby, who took it down to the hotel to Gerard. "She will be up here otherwise. How is he?" nodding at the door of the sick-room. Gerard had taken the dressing-room outside the chamber in which his father lay, and stayed there day and night.

"He knows nobody," said Gerard sadly. "Smiles at his fingers like a child, when he awakes."

"Have you spoken to him?"

"Yes. He knows nobody. The doctor says he is out of danger, boldily."

"He fears for his mind? Permanently?"

"I am afraid so," answered Gerard with a dreary sigh.

"He may go at any hour," said George gloomily—"at any hour." Gerard answered only by another sign. "We are all in the same boat, Gerard. Wire to your mother, and tell her not to be alarmed, and then write to-night."

"Yes, yes," answered Gerard; and his cousin went sadly away again. At that moment the door was rapped by a waiter, who brought in letters for Gerard, redirected and sent on from the Hall by Milly. He looked at them absently, and seeing that one came from Constance, he opened it and read it. She wrote as coolly as ever, but bade him come and see her if he should come to town, and gave her address this time. Icily brief as it was, the note would have made him happy a day or two before; and now, having read it, he laid it to his breast with a great sob, and hung his head, as if to hide from the mere daylight the blinding tears in his eyes. But recovering himself after awhile, he answered his mother's message, and afterward sat down and wrote her a cheerful letter, asking her to come to London, and telling her that his father had been unwell, but was recovering now. "She will think it a slight matter," he thought, "and why should she be troubled, poor soul, before her time? She will be troubled enough, when she knows."

When she came next day with Milly, she found her husband sitting up in bed, with a pinched and vacant look

upon his face. He knew nobody, but smiled at her—an awful smile—and talked disjointedly of things that had happened years ago. Then Gerard discovered that his kindly meant deceit was cruel: for the shock well-nigh cost his mother her wits, and for an hour or two she was pale and helpless and as cold as marble. But a great fit of crying coming to her aid, she recovered herself, and sat down beside her husband's bed; and she and Milly watched there to the exclusion of all others but Gerard and the doctors. They told her nothing of the affairs of the house, thinking one trouble enough at a time. Gerard sent no word to Constance, but waited like a man condemned until the last stroke should fall. It fell on Tuesday, a week and a day after the elder Lumby's arrival in town. The two junior partners came together in the dusk of the afternoon, and he saw the doom of the House in their faces.

"It is all over," said the elder of the two in a commonplace voice.

"Yes," said the other. "We closed the doors at half-past two. We heard it cried by the newsboys in the streets as we came here."

Gerard took up his hat and made as if to leave the room, but there was such a look upon his face that the two cousins, exchanging a swift glance, stepped between him and the door, and each laid a friendly hand upon him. "Where are you going, Gerard?" asked George.

He looked at them, first at one and then at the other, and reading their fear, shook his head, and tried to smile. "I am going to see my sweetheart," said the simple Gerard, choking down a sob. "I must tell her what has happened, and say good-bye. She can't marry a pauper; and I don't want her to learn the news from the papers. I sha'n't be long away. You can keep it from my mother for a time. She has enough to bear."

"They know it in the hotel," said George. "The very waiters know it. We are all in the same boat, Gerard."

They shook hands sadly, as men before now have shaken hands in shipwreck, waiting for the shock and the plunge, and Gerard passed into the streets, and walked, deep beneath the waters of despair. How he reached the little house in Chesterfield Street, he never knew; but he stood at last before the door, and asked quietly for Miss Jolly, and sent in his card and waited. To the day of his death

he will not forget that waiting. It seemed long, long before the little parlor-maid returned and marshaled him upstairs and into Constance's presence. She came with a languid grace to meet him, and held out her hand; but at the sight of his face, paused, and looked at him with greatening eyes.

"I have come to say good-bye," he said. His heart was like ice in his breast.

"Good-bye?" she answered. "Gerard! What do you mean?" She fancied she read something like a threat in his manner. Looks are hard to read, and the reader is likely to see himself reflected in their characters. She was fresh from thinking of Val Strange. Of what was Gerard thinking?

"Yes," he answered; "I am here to say good-bye. You can't marry a pauper." His voice was strained and harsh, and he spoke with difficulty. "The House has failed. I have come to tell you so, and to give you back your freedom."

"The House has failed. The firm?"

"The firm of Lumby and Lumby is bankrupt," he responded. "I won't detain you," he added helplessly, not knowing what words found their way to his lips. "Good-bye!" With that he turned, and suddenly flung both arms abroad with the ultimate gesture of despair, and dropped them, heavily, at his sides. What could she say? What comfort could she offer? What consolation could reach him? "Work and hope, and I will wait." Ah, she was not free to say that. She might have said it to the man she loved, and have dared her father's opposition, and poverty, and the cankering cares of waiting years, as many a maid had done before her for a true man's sake. But she had no such balm for Gerard, who being shorn of wealth was shorn of all.

Perhaps in some inmost corner of his heart he waited for some command which should give him life again. Perhaps, at the sight of his despair, she half wished that she could give it. She touched him timidly on the sleeve, awed by the silence of his grief, for she knew that he had loved her well, and she guessed at something of his miseries. At that touch he turned, and for one passionate moment held her in his arms; then, with a cry like that of some wild

creature in extreme pain, he released her, and rushed from the room and from the house.

* * * * * * *

Constance, thus left alone, was filled with many struggling emotions, amongst which it would not have been easy for any philosopher to discern the uppermost. Gerard had half frightened her by the wildness of his farewell; and she would have been less than woman had she been unmelted by his grief. His trouble, as it referred to her, naturally touched her less than did the loss of his fortune. "Me?" she thought (and not unwisely, for she judged from what she knew), "he will grieve because he has lost me, perhaps for a month or two; but he will feel the loss of his fortune all his life." She could not, struggle as she might, disguise from herself the fact that she was pleased to be free. She had never greatly cared for him. Since that first day when the warmth of his ardor had a little touched her heart, he had never raised a thrill in her. And since then Val Strange had risen on the horizon of her life, and in spite of herself she had glided into such a love for him as she never guessed or dreamed before. Yes; she was sorry for Gerard, but she was pleased to be free. And yet Val had gone away, resolutely bent on curing himself, and to that end had set an inexorable distance between himself and her, and might stay away for years. Why, since it was to come, could not Gerard's misfortune have come a week sooner? She hated herself for that cruel thought; but it was there, and she could not drive it from her. Poor Gerard! She respected him greatly, and liked him coldly; and if she had been an empress with gifts to give, she would have given him a new fortune, and have taken joy in the gift. She could scarcely have been sorrier for his loss if he had been her brother. But he had many friends, and amongst them Gerard would do very well. Anything like the bitterness of downright poverty was of course impossible for him. He could never come to that.

Gerard pacing lonely in the gaslit streets, gave the lost fortune little thought. There was grief enough for him in his mother's grief, in his father's helplessness, in his own loss of love, and hope of love. He had always been so used to money that the prospect of poverty could take no hold upon him. Only those who have felt the grip of poverty know so much as how to dread it. In the midst of

his afflictions, poverty seemed likely to be the lightest, and it was certainly the only one amongst them which a heart at once sound and gentle could at first sight scorn. It was burned into him that he had come away without one word of farewell from Constance. That seemed hard. But she had never made any great pretense at caring for him, and his thoughts began to be bitter. Yet poor Gerard was too simply noble to hold that mood long, and by and by he began to defend her, and to yearn over her, and to pray that whatever came to him she might be happy. He even tried to take pleasure in the belief that she had not loved him, on the ground that she would not grieve at his leaving her; but at that his sorely tried heart rebelled. He would like her to feel some grief at that—a little.

Some thirty years ago, the Sage of Chelsea preached one dogma, worded thus—"By all means, at all times consume your own smoke." For the carriage of this dogma into practical every-day working Gerard was peculiarly fitted. He said nothing of his personal griefs to any man or woman. He avoided all mention of them to his mother even, and resolutely and heroically fought them down. But the conflict wore him thin and pale; and in this midst of all their distresses, Milly and his mother had no keener grief than this of Gerard's. The days went on, the great bankruptcy was noised abroad, and other lesser bankruptcies followed it in due course. Garling's vast fraud widened and broadened in its consequences, as great crimes will; and people who had never heard of him, and never did hear of him, went hungry because of him. The properties of the firm were sold at auction; the very desk at which old Johnson had sat these fifty years was knocked down to the highest bidder before the veteran's sorrowing eyes; the very ledgers went for waste paper, all but the latest; the premises themselves were sold, realizing a price so vast that creditors reading it grew easier in their minds; the senior partner's private properties were impounded with the rest, stocks and shares and balance at the banker's; and Lumby Hall was in the market.

Then it came out, when the panic was over, that there was enough for everybody, even the lawyers, and that there was a little to be saved after all. But in the middle of the distresses, and in this pale gleam of joy which followed them, the head of the great wrecked house of Lumby and

Lumby sat like a child, with no more than a child's joys and a child's sorrows, smiling at the sunlight playing on his wall, or whimpering to be lonely in the dusk. His memory was a ruin. He knew nobody.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ALL DAY, HIRAM LOOKED ABOUT FOR CHANCES, AND NEXT MORNING HE SET OUT AFOOT IN PURSUIT OF EMPLOYMENT.

"MR. SEARCH," said the official of that Omnibus Company who controlled Hiram's destinies, "after to-day, your services will not be required."

"Oh?" said Hiram. "I reckon I've got a right to ask what that's for."

"You have twice appointed a substitute without leave, and you were yesterday two hours absent from your post without even appointing a substitute. The drivers tell me that the block in Cheapside was your fault, and yours only."

"He's may be right, mister," responded the conductor. "But it won't happen again."

"I'll take care of that," said the official person.

"It'll suit me better to hold on awhile," said Hiram, "if you don't mind. It's rather an awkward corner to get thrown off at, this is. Give me another trial."

"We shall not require your services after to-day," repeated the official dryly.

"Then I must try to get along without yourn," responded Hiram. "'Bus conducting ain't half such a berth as the Prince of Wales's, is it?"

"It's a pity," said the official, shaking his head at Hiram, a little mollified by the discharge of his own thunderbolt, "that you don't stick at your work, Search. You're a smart fellow, and a sober fellow; and if you'd only stick, you'd do."

"There was a minister had a nigger once, mister," returned Hiram, "and whenever he misbehaved, the parson used to cowhide him. And while he cowhided he'd take a text and preach, just so as Peter shouldn't find the thing monotonous. One day Peter turns round and kind o'

makes an appeal. 'If you flog, flog,' says he; 'and if you preach, preach; but don't flog and preach too, at the same time.'"

"Oh, yes," said the official, shaking his head again at Hiram with a humorous aspect; "I know that yarn. I've heard it before, Search—I've heard it before."

"Well, now," said Hiram, with a propitiatory twinkle in his eye, "I go with Peter. Don't give me the sack *and* lecture me. Look here! You take the sack back again, and lecture me till I'm good. It won't take long."

"No, Search, no," returned the unbending official. "It can't be overlooked. Here's my last word: if you like to come back in a week's time, I'll give you another chance—perhaps." Therewith he turned and left the delinquent.

"That won't do," said Hiram, addressing himself emphatically. "There's a chance a minute opening somewhere. I can't afford to wait a week for one. There's the little gell to be provided for. It's kind of you to offer me a holiday, mister, but I can't stop to take it. Here goes the whole population of this planet hot-foot, full tilt, running fit to split from dawn to sunset every day, after the day's rations, with some exalted parties looking on serene and smilin' at the racket—Dukes and a Prince or tew; but it's no use for me to sit down alongside thè superior human article. Perhaps I could smile at the racket as pretty as any of 'em; but that wouldn't find me two day's rations every day; and I must run with the ruck, I reckon, and kick and elber right and left, and run cunning. Very well, then. Bank, ma'am! Whitechapel, mister! This way for the Bank. Reg'lar load o' capitalists to-day. Get along!"

All day, Hiram looked about for chances, and next morning he set out afoot in pursuit of employment. After many intricate wanderings, many inquiries, and as many rebuffs, he came, in a retired tumble-down square midway between Fleet Street and Holborn, upon an announcement that compositors were wanted. Anything dingier than the dingy placard which bade Hiram inquire within, anything dirtier than the windows, anything filthier and more rickety than the stairs, he had not seen in London. Upon one landing, a barrel of printer's ink had leaked, and having trodden upon the sticky mass, he plowed his way upstairs

as a fly goes over that humane invention the "catch-'em-alive." An exaggerated smell of damp newspaper—the distinctive odor which attaches to an ill-ventilated printing-office—saluted the applicant's nostrils; and a hot blast of air, such as a furnace might be supposed to breathe if its digestive apparatus were thoroughly diseased, swept at him as he opened a swinging door at the head of the stairs. Right and left at double frames, pale men and weedy lads faced each other, picking up types as if for bare life. In the streets, the spring sunshine had been bright; but here, above every double frame hung a cob-webbed gas-bracket, patched with pasted paper here and there, to cure the leakage of gas, which nevertheless smelled horribly; and from each bracket sprung two flaring lights, with flimsy sheets of green paper hung before them on a contrivance of wire, to shelter the worker's eyes from the glare. No man or boy looked up from his work to remark the new-comer; but after an uncertain pause of perhaps a minute, a sallow, melancholy looking man in a ragged frock-coat and a soiled apron, appeared at another door, and approaching Hiram, asked his business.

"You want compositors?" asked Hiram.

"Yes," said the other.

"I want work."

"Very well," said the melancholy-looking man; "you can begin at once, if you like." He led the way to a frame on which reposed a pair of empty cases. "All this matter is for distribution. It's all minion, and all one font." Saying this, he pointed to a galley-rack on which rested many columns of half-washed type, and betook himself to the other end of the room.

"Say," said Hiram to a pale and long-drawn lad at the next case, "is there a sink here anywhere?" The lad nodded his head sideways, and went on with his work. Hiram lifted a galley and carried it to the sink, and having washed the type thoroughly, took up a handful and began to throw it into the case. His fingers had lost the feel of custom, and he was awkward at first; but he recovered the art by and by, and went ahead at a great rate. "Work pretty regular here?" he asked his neighbor.

"Yes," said he, nodding vigorously at the case and working head and shoulders with unnecessary ardor.

"Piece or 'stab?" inquired Hiram laconically. The in-

quiry being translated meant: "Are we paid by results, or at settled rate?" *'Stab* is compositors' English for established, and is even, by that system of compression in vogue amongst them, made to signify a certain fixed wage. In their working hours, compositors are the most taciturn of all working-people.

"Haven't you asked?" inquired the youth, turning his eyes on Hiram for the first time.

"No," said Hiram. The pale lad, having once looked at him, seemed determined to see as much of him as he conveniently could at one eyeful. The new-comer had turned back the cuffs of his shirt over coat sleeves of new black cloth; and the cuffs were white, and were, as their position proxed, actually attached to an under garment. Hiram's collar, presumably belonging to the same garment, was spotless, his boots were well made and new. His well-brushed glossy stove-pipe hat hung on a peg behind him. The pale lad gaped at this show of respectability.

"I don't fancy you are one of our sort," he said, meekly.

"No?" said Hiram, rattling the type into the boxes, growing pretty full by this time. "Why?"

"It's a turn-over house," returned the lad. "We're all improvers here."

"That's a moral blessing in its way," responded Hiram, to whom the lad's phrases bore no meaning. "Ain't it, now?"

The pale youth smiled drearily in answer to Hiram's glance. "We're turn-over apprentices," he explained. "We've never served our time, and we don't belong to the Union; so we get only paid half-rates."

"What's that?" said Hiram.

"Why," said the lad, "it's sevenpence halfpenny a thousand for minion. That's the regular pay. They give us threepence three-farthings here. At the end of the week you put in a bill at full prices, and they halve it. Suppose you put in a bill for two pounds, you'll get a sovereign."

Hiram gave vent to a long faint whistle, and having at that moment cleared his hand, walked over to the melancholy-looking man in the soiled apron.

"Look here, mister," said he, and repeated the lad's statement. "Is that so?" The melancholy man in the soiled apron said it was. "So," said Hiram, "you reckon

on half-starving this mean crowd, as an indoocement to them to cut the throat of the trade they starve by." The melancholy man said he might put it that way if he liked. "Well," responded Hiram, "when a man's hard up, he gets into singular company. You don't seem to thrive, and there's a kind of saddened aspect about the hull kyhoot. I don't make one of this ragged regiment, mister. No, sir, I do not. I am not afraid to work. I could always beard Employment in his den, and Labor in its hall! But my intellec'," added Hiram, with a gracious smile, "is not yet sufficiently overcooked to permit me to live with this peculiar enterprise. Good-afternoon, sir."

"I thought it wouldn't suit you," said the pale youth, who had given Hiram the character of the place. "They ain't a high-spirited lot as comes here." He rubbed his nose with the back of of his composing-stick as he made this reflection, and cast a longing look at the case of type which Hiram had left partly filled. His own one was almost empty.

"You can take that," said Hiram, adjusting his cuffs and reaching for his hat. The lad thanked him, and changed the position of the cases; and Hiram departed, without being noticed much by anybody. "An hour and a half wasted," he thought as he went down the little inky stairs and emerged upon the streets again. "I'm game to run as cunning as I can," said Hiram, drawing a long breath of pure air; "but I'll do nothing to be ashamed of. Me and my little gell can starve, without cutting other people's throats to be allowed to do it."

For the first time since that adventurous summer day on which he had met Gerard Lumby, the sun went down without his having earned a half-penny. This reflection saddened him, and he went home footsore and weary. Sitting alone, and smoking a pipe over the ashes of the fire which had that morning boiled his tea and cooked his rasher of bacon, he resolved on a house-to-house visitation through the business realms of London, in search of employment. The stupendous nature of that inquisition half frightened him at first; but on reflection, he adopted the method as being, after all, the only practical one. "I can't advertise," he said between the whiffs of his pipe, "because I haven't got the money; and if I had, what could I advertise for? 'To THE GENERAL PUBLIC—A YOUNG MAN

who knows his way about, and has traveled, is open to employment as clerk, scenic artist, newspaper editor, chair-mender, compositor, architect, or sandwich-man. Berth in clothes-store good enough to begin with. No reasonable offer refused. Open to negotiate with bill-stickers, railway companies, members of Parliament, and the public generally.' They'd laff at that," said Hiram with a dreary sadness. "In this effete old empire, a man seems to think he's done his duty if he's learned enough of one craft to help him cheat somebody into believing that he can work at it. They bind him prentice to learn bricklayin'; and if he's got a head on him at all, he knows all they can teach him in as many days as they make him spend years. They reckon on taking seven years to teach a man to stick types on end, and they won't let him earn a living at it till that seven years is wasted. I'm a fairish smith, and I'm a decent wheelwright, and there ain't a better cabinet-maker in London; but because I haven't wasted seven years apiece in learning to use hammer, spokeshave, and chisel, I'm a trade pariah. That is what is the matter with me—I'm a trade pariah. And I call it too cruel ridiculous, that because I'm smarter than ten of these fellers put together, I'm offered half-wages." He knocked the ashes from his pipe, and laid it down on the hob tenderly. It was the identical pipe he had vainly striven to light in the lane ten miles from Brierham, and he had an affection for it. "No," he continued, half aloud: "I can't advertise; and what's the good of answering! I suppose I can't have spent less than two pound at that since I've been in London; and I never had so much as one reply. There was that clerkship I went for personally. Shall I ever forget it? A street full of respectable applicants, and every man-jack of 'em with testimonials enough to fill a butcher's basket. I shall get slanged a good deal on this journey; I shall be a decided noosance to a heap of Christian people. But where there's an advertisement, I'm one of five hundred; and here at least I *shall* have a chance of lighting on somebody who wants me, and hasn't had time to advertise for me and bring the other four hundred and ninety-nine cavorting around. It's the other four hundred and ninety-nine that spoils things. Five hundred rats, and only one wanted to take charge of the candle-store. Five hundred redskins, and one white scalp. Five hundred frying-pans and only one

fire." A mere moonbeam of a smile illuminated his long countenance. "I am becomin' figgerative," he said, "and that says, 'Lively, Hiram.' You'd like another fill, wouldn't you?" apostrophizing his pipe. "You look hungry. You shall have it." He filled his pipe again, and having lit it, began slowly to undress. This was his first night in new lodgings. Mary was disposed of for the time being; and it had been determined between them that she should try on the morrow to recover her old situation. They were going to get married, for pure economy's sake, so soon as that became practicable. The depressing influence which attaches to new places was upon him. He was and had been for years a wanderer, and yet he felt it for once keenly. There are some who never quite master that depression. I have but once spent an unbroken three months under one roof since I was three-and-twenty, and yet a new abode is always dismal for the first half hour. The tables are unfriendly; the chairs have a stand-off air; the grave voice of the clock is the voice of a stranger; and the very fire shows new faces.

It is not necessary that a man should have been bred like Bayard to be as chivalrous as he; and Hiram, sitting in his shirt-sleeves on the bedside, and pulling solemnly and slowly at the well-blacked clay, was as full of manly tenderness and stout resolve as he could hold. "It makes a man sort of fearful and thin-skinned to have a gell to look after," soliloquized our philosophic hero. "Can't help thinking what she'd do if I broke down. The city gets a man under, too. Hiram! Mister Search! Think of what depends on you, and hold your head up and step out firm. That's better. Now, then; into bed you go. Pleasant dreams, Hiram. Good-night, darlin'. Sleep my pretty little gell, sleep! sleep, and forget your troubles. If I was a cherub, you shouldn't hurt for want of watching." And Hiram, fairly worn, blew out his candle, laid down the well-blacked clay gingerly on the floor, turned over, and, not unmindful of his Maker, fell asleep.

He was out early in the morning, and began his round. Busy people declined to waste a moment on him. Others with more leisure questioned him, and sent him on again. Some were civil, some were not. It made no difference to him; he went out at one door and in at another, and ran through his formula with unfailing pluck

and cheerfulness. That went on all day from nine in the morning till seven in the evening, and nothing came of it but weariness. He crept home footsore and with a little failing at the heart. If you have "No" thrown at your head three hundred times running in a single day, you are likely to grow disheartened. Next morning he began again, and prosecuted his weary task till noon. That frozen monosyllable barred every door with a barrier like ice, until at last he came upon a restaurateur in a little street off the Strand, who offered him a berth as a waiter on condition that he made a deposit of two pounds and gave a satisfactory reference. He gave a reference to the official who had dismissed him, went home and pawned everything but one suit of clothes and his linen, raised the money, and on the following day entered on his new business.

He was not in an exalted sphere of life; but it began in a very short time to pay better than omnibus-conducting. The restaurant was not long opened, and was by no means a high-class concern; but it began in its own way to thrive, and Hiram thrived with it. It was in the man's nature to take a pride in whatever he did; and before he had been in the new line a fortnight, he performed conjuring tricks with knives, forks, and plates that were wonderful to look at. Like the proverbial good actor, who lives his part, Hiram threw himself head and heels into the character; and as soon as the funds would allow it, he blossomed forth in an evening suit and a stiff white necktie. The proprietor rallied him a little, and the regular customers chaffed him mildly, on this butterfly leap from the chrysalis garb. He smiled blandly, and the owner of the place began to think he had picked up a jewel. Hiram, as the business of the place improved, received something considerable in the way of tips, and began once more to lay by money. Then out came from his fictionary uncle's care Gerald's half-sovereign, and this, being drilled, was suspended to the watch-chain which once again hung across Hiram's waistcoat.

He had scarce been invested more than a month, when one day a young gentleman entered sadly, and seating himself, called for a chop and a pint of bitter beer. From the moment of his entry, Hiram fixed his gaze upon him, and when he sat down, walked to his side and awaited his order with a countenance of many emotions. When the order,

given with bent head, came to Hiram's ears, his face changed ludicrously. He passed on the demand for a chop with a private signal to the cook to do his best; and having set the pint measure beside the new-comer, he rattled about with knives and forks and water-bottle, keeping a corner of his eye on the guest meanwhile. If his object was to induce him to raise his head, it failed; but when he brought the chop, he succeeded in getting a near look at the stranger's face. There was no other customer there at the moment; and Hiram watched him with a look of evident pity and amazement. The stranger eat his simple meal, and paid for it, and went his way without a glance at the waiter who found him so deeply interesting. Being left to his own devices, Hiram took up a copy of "The Times" and turned to the advertising columns.

"Yes," he said under his breath; "there's no mistake. Eh, dear, now! 'Lumby Hall,'" he read, "'ten miles from Brierham, four from Colham, five from Dene.' That's where I saw him first and last. Great smash in the city. Supposed gigantic frauds by Mr. Garling. Lumby and Lumby. Same name. Comes from same part of the country. Could afford to chuck half-sovereigns about in them days. Come down to take his meals in a shanty like this. And the man that's ruined him is the father of my little gell. Eh, dear!" And Hiram sighed most piteously, and sat for ten minutes in tragic amaze, until an order for broiled kidneys awoke him from his stupor.

It was indeed Gerard Lumby whom Hiram Search had seen; but Hiram, though he guessed rightly in most respects, had somewhat overleaped the truth in his belief that Gerard was yet so poor that a few pence spent upon luncheon made a difference to him. Amongst his friends —and this episode, since it led to nothing but his meeting with Hiram, may briefly here be mentioned and dismissed —was one who had been a fellow of his college, and now, having married, and thereby resigned his fellowship, had associated himself with a daily journal. There was then, as usual, a disturbance in the east of Europe, the unspeakable Turk and the equally unspeakable Christian of those parts being occupied in recriminatory raids and murders; and Gerard's friend sought him out when he heard of the failure of the firm, and offered him employment as a special correspondent. Gerard leaped at this proposal; and it was

to discuss it, that he had come into the street in which the new restaurant was situate. The newspaper offices were only half a dozen doors below, on the same side.

The business not having come to a head between the Eastern unspeakables, the journey Gerard meditated was delayed; but he went to the offices daily, and almost daily lunched at the new restaurant. In the simplicity of his mind, Hiram imagined that this was the principal, perhaps the only, meal of the young man's day. To suit his fallen fortunes, poor Gerard had sold all his jewelry, and he had become neglectful of his dress. He was not slovenly, but the old precision and nicety had vanished. In the old days, he had carried his head a thought too proudly. He hung it now habitually, and his face was pale. It was no wonder, for his heart was alternate frost and fire; and what with his father's loss of all manly faculty, and his mother's grief, and his own loss of love and fortune all at one fell swoop, such cankering miseries gnawed the poor fellow's soul as were almost too much for humanity to bear. Hiram began to see him daily, with here and there the pause of a day between. To Hiram's imagination, Gerard's occasional absences meant—no dinner. The tough-tender Yankee began to yearn over him and to sorrow for him. He was too delicate—in a word, he was too much a gentleman—to claim acquaintance with his benefactor in these days of fallen fortune; but one day, when Gerard—after a two days' absence this time—took his usual chop and drank water instead of beer for some no-reason, and neglected to leave behind him the twopence with which he had commonly rewarded the waiter's service, Hiram leaped further along the mistaken road, and jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Gerard Lumby and actual famine were beginning to make acquaintance with each other. So, begging and obtaining an hour's leave of absence, the mistaken one slipped out after Gerard, and dogged him home to chambers in the Temple, where he was staying with an old college chum now called to the bar. Hiram saw him enter by means of a latch-key, and went back again. But that night he wrote upon a bit of writing-paper in a clerkly hand the singular words: "From a true and grateful friend, who remembers a kindness." He folded up in the paper a half-crown, and—dropped it into the letter-box, addressed to Gerard Lumby, Esq.

Gerard dined, or lunched, more plenteously next day, and took cheese. Hiram served him almost with tears in his eyes, and that night dropped another half-crown into the letter-box, ticketed, "From the same." To Gerard's sore heart these well-intentioned but unnecessary gifts were bitter and enraging, and he asked himself again and again who the base enemy could be who chose so cruel a method of humiliating him in his misery. Sitting in his friend's rooms alone that night, with his own aching thoughts for company, he heard a stealthy footstep ascend the stair. Wrathfully expectant, he arose, drew back the latch of the door, and waited. The third package dropped by the unknown hand fell with a dull little clang into the letter-box. Gerard dashed the door open, and seized a dark, retreating figure.

"Come in," he said, in low tones that boded no good to the captive. "Let me have a look at you." The lithe Hiram struggled like an eel; but the vise-like grip only tightened on him; and, strong as the Yankee was, the athletic Briton walked him into the room, and had him hatless under the gaslight, whilst you could say "Jack Robinson."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A BLUE FOOLSCAP DOCUMENT, WRITTEN IN A STIFF AND LEGIBLE HAND, LAY ON THE PAGE BEFORE HIM.

On a bright spring evening, Val Strange's yacht dropped anchor in sight of Welbeck Head and Brierham spire; and four stout fellows pulled him ashore, and landed him in a little bay four miles from home. He knew the country; and leaving the waste sea-beach behind him, struck into the fields, and strolled through green meadows and by fast-greening boughs toward Brierham. The very earth was odorous, and the air like balm. Welbeck Head, half a dozen miles to the left, looked in the light of the setting sun as if it were built of burnished bronze; and in its hollows lay shadows so purple and so liquid, that one might well have fancied every cranny of the vast headland filled with wine. The western air was refulgent gold; the eastern air a pearly rose; and the zenith, a blue so soft and dreamy, it drew the soul as well as the eye toward it, and led out all

the observer's nature in vain sweet hopes and fancies. Val surrendered himself to Fate, or in surrendering, had created Fate. Who cared? But he was not at ease. Regret and dissatisfaction lurked at the bottom of all his thoughts. There are times when all things resemble the little book which the angel gave to John in Patmos, and the utmost sweetness has its bitter undertaste and aftertaste. Eye and ear and nostril drank delight as he walked; but the soul sat tremulous in the midst of joy, and read half-veiled prophecies of sorrow and disaster. The heart of man is deceitful above all things. Val had contrived to turn himself from false friend and dishonest lover into knight-deliverer. It would be virtue in Constance to break her engagement with Gerard—

> Since therein she would evitate and shun
> A thousand irreligious cursèd hours
> Which forcèd marriage would have brought upon her.

Val's acquaintance with Shakespeare could not let him miss an excuse so forcibly put, and so pat to his own desires. And it was virtue in him also to persuade her to break that bond. He persuaded himself that he had been a coward in running away, and that it was a duty toward all three concerned—toward Constance and Gerard and himself to hinder a union in which on one side there was no love and no possibility of love. Let a man set himself to the task of self-persuasion—let him gag Conscience, and lend his ear to his own soul's sophistry, and he can credit anything. Val is not the only man who has transmuted scoundrelism into heroism, or deified his own desire and set it up as duty.

He was not by any means sure of his plans; but he was resolved on enduring no delay. He would find a means of communicating with Constance, and he would leave no effort unmade to deliver her from the possibility of a loveless marriage. He was willing to face contumely, to endure his friend's hatred and scorn, to know that hard things would be said of him by men whose judgment he valued. And since he quailed from these things in his inmost heart, he found it heroism to face them, and was no more a fool or a villain in that self-deceit than ninety-nine out of a hundred might be if they set their minds that way. "So *carpe diem*, Juan, *carpe, carpe.*" Ah, the note of

joy rings false in the voice of the most mournful of all British singers, and in the silence that follows may steal the tones of an older and a wiser poet: "Rejoice, oh, young man. . . but remember!"

Walking in such mood as I have striven to indicate, Val came in the course of half an hour or thereabouts upon that ugly landscape-spoiling property of his, the paper-mill; and there, in the act of mounting his dog-cart, was Henderson the manager. Henderson, catching sight of Val, descended and awaited his coming.

"The sight of you is good for sore eyes, Mr. Strange," said he. "You are looking wonderfully well, sir." And indeed Val was mahogany colored with his six weeks of sea-breezes.

"Any news in this dull quarter of the world?" he asked.

The manager quite stared at him. "News, sir? Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"You don't mean to say," said Henderson, "that you know nothing of what has happened to anybody down here?"

"But I do mean to say it," Val returned. "What *has* happened? Whose cat is dead?" For Henderson was a marvelous retailer of marvels which had in them very little of the wonderful for other people.

"Lumby Hall and the Park are in the market, to begin with," responded the manager, with something of the air of one who justifies himself.

Val turned pale under his bronze, and repeated the words questioningly: "Lumby Hall and Park are in the market?"

"The House has gone to pieces. The cashier, Snarling—no, Garling—that was his name—bolted with half a million, so it's said, and everything has gone under the hammer."

This news shook the hearer from head to foot, and he held on by the rail of the dog-cart, and cast so stricken a look on Henderson that the worthy man was alarmed, and insisted on Val entering the office and sitting down.

"I'd no idea, sir," he said, "that the news would affect you so. Let me offer you a little whisky. It's just a sample that I had sent in yesterday." He opened a cupboard, and produced a black bottle and a wine-glass.

"No!" said Val, waving his hand against it. "It was so horribly sudden, I was shocked. What has become of—of Gerard Lumby? He was going to be married, poor fellow."

"Yes," said Henderson, almost with a relish. "He was going to wed that handsome lass at the Grange, Mr. Jolly's daughter. That's all broken off now, of course. The losses have driven poor old Mr. Lumby out of his senses; and they tell me he just sits like a baby, and counts his fingers, and they feed him like a child."

"Horrible!" said Val with a shudder. He felt as if he had planned to break into a house, and heaven's lightning had scattered it to ruin and ashes at his feet. All this news had become quite an old story to Henderson and his compeers. The interest had faded out, and it was a pleasure now to renew it by telling the tale to one who was so deeply moved by it. He flowed on, therefore, and told all he knew, and perhaps a trifle more.

"And curiously enough," he added, when his tale was done, "we've got a memento of the great commercial disaster here. It came this very afternoon; and if you'll come this way, I'll show it to you."

Val followed him, incurious. His mind was still deadened by the shock of thoughts which had assailed him at the first. Constance was free, and his guilty plan—for he knew its guilt in the searching light of that moment—was no longer needed. And Gerard, his friend, had not only lost the love Val had meant to steal from him—but had lost all with her—father, fortune, home. Val Strange trembled at that swift and awful blow, and loathed the thought of his own falsity to honor.

The manager led the way from the office to the working chambers of the mill, and halted in a great storehouse with rough-cast walls, where tons of waste-paper lay heaped to the ceiliing—vast piles of newspaper returns; whole libraries of worthless books torn from their bindings, and ranged in level rows or thrown in heaps; pyramids of coarse packing-papers, pyramids of lawyers' briefs, parliamentary returns, blue-books, contractors' specifications—a thousand things that had served their turn, or swerved aside from it and fallen useless; and at the edge of the waste, a column of books of unusual size. The binding had been torn

from these, and the backs were a tangle of broken string and cracked strips of glue.

"These," said the manager, "are Lumby and Lumby's ledgers. I got them for the mill for a mere trifle." There was a rough table on strong trestles in the room; and Henderson, lifting one of the great volumes, laid it down and turned over the leaves. "Splendid stuff," he said, with the paper between his finger and thumb. "They had everything made to last; and you'd have thought the concern as solid as the hills."

Val absently took a leaf of the great ledger and turned it over, and looked at the methodical neat entries, column after column. The action and the glance were alike automatic. He had no thought of what he saw. Mr. Henderson swelled himself a little with the natural dignity of the showman, and looked on, pleased with his discovery and with its effect upon his employer. A workman in search of somebody in authority, looked into the building, and seeing the manager there, told him of some slight matter that had gone wrong. Henderson with more alacrity than common, departed to set the something right and Val was left alone. Turning over the great stiff pages absently, he came upon some papers crushed between the leaves, and mechanically smoothing them, uttered a sudden exclamation. Next he snatched up these papers, and read them at a glance, and laid them down again with his head whirling. A wild surprise and a terrible temptation reached his mind together, for the papers he had discovered were no other than the drafts made out by Garling in surrender of his booty. A blue foolscap document, written in a stiff and legible hand, lay on the page before him, and Val's eyes swept over these words, clear as print:

"In consideration of the receipt of a written promise to refrain from criminal proceedings, this day handed to me by Gerard Horatio Lumby, I the undersigned, make confession that I have robbed the firm of Lumby and Lumby, of 107 Gresham Street, of the sum of two hundred and fifth-three thousand two hundred pounds, and do now make full and complete restitution of the same.

"EDWARD GARLING."

Henderson's voice sounded outside, giving final instructions about that trifling something wrong which had called

him away; and Val, with an impulse for which he did not care to account, swiftly folded the papers and transferred them to his breast-pocket. His ready instinct told him that while ignorant as to *how* the "full and complete restitution" was to be made, he nevertheless perhaps held in his possession the key to recovered fortune for his rival and his friend. Constance was free; but how long might she remain free if he handed these all-important papers at once to their rightful owners? The temptation which assailed him in the instant of discovery was not to destroy the papers—for that would have been too gross a crime for him to contemplate—but to reserve them until he had made good his own ground with Constance. In the mere fraction of a second, his mind seemed to take in every side of the case. Gerard had already lost Constance, and by this time had at least recognized the fact, if he had not yet begun to grow reconciled to it. If he, Valentine Strange, succeeded Gerard Lumby as her affianced husband, Gerard Lumby would be no worse off than now; and if, thereafter, he handed over the discovered papers, Gerard would have every reason, comparatively, to be happy. If, on the other hand, he did what his honorable and native instinct prompted him to do, and gave up the papers at once, was there not a chance that Gerard would reassert his claim, and a chance that the claim would be allowed? Whilst all this and more raged through his mind, Henderson returned.

"You're really looking ill, Mr. Strange," he said, surprised at Val's aspect. "You'd better let me drive you home."

No, Val protested; he was well enough—a little startled, that was all. He would walk across the fields. And so, with a brief leave-taking, he was going, when he bethought him of a precautionary measure. "Don't you have those ledgers meddled with, Henderson," he said. "I should like to look at them. Leave them as they are." Henderson promised. Mr. Strange's desire was an understandable whim enough. Val was keen and quick, and had something of that faculty which makes successful scoundrels and great generals; in things that really interested him, he left nothing essential undone. He had not yet decided whether or not to be an utter knave; and if the papers had afterward to be rediscovered, it would be well to have

a reasonable place in which to rediscover them. What better place could there be than that in which they had been originally discovered? But he had not gone a hundred yards away from the mill, when he returned. Henderson was again mounting his dog-cart when Val came running back to him.

"On second thoughts, Henderson, don't keep those ledgers. Use them up at once. I can't bear to see them again. Use them up first thing to-morrow."

Again Henderson promised, and again Mr. Strange's desire was an understandable whim enough. How should the manager guess the fight in his employer's soul which resulted in those contradictory orders? Val strode away across the fields rapidly, half-fearing lest he should rescind the order. So weak was he to resist the tempest which tossed him, that before he had again reached the place at which he had turned back, he threw himself on chance to know whether he should finally keep or destroy the ledgers. On that point for the moment he contrived to pivot the greater question—whether he should here and now play the man, or play the knave. "Heads, I keep them—Tail's, they go." He drew a few loose coins from his pocket. Heads predominated! Fate seemed to tempt him; but a sudden revulsion at the thought that honor should be at the mercy of so poor a chance, sent him along the road again, and he left the great ledgers doomed behind him.

The domestics of his house were used to his comings and goings, and he found all things in tolerable readiness. An hour or two after his arrival, dinner was served up, and he sat down to it with little appetite, and toyed with the dishes one after another, and sent them away scarcely tasted. He had not yet made up his mind, and could not; but over a bottle of Clos de Vougeot and a cigar in his own especial den, he completed the perusal of Garling's entire narrative, and so made himself familiar with the whole circumstances of the case. In that narrative he scarcely knew whether to wonder most at the insolent completeness of the disclosure, or the amazing patience and cunning of the fraud. "My crime," "my fraud," "my system of embezzlement," and kindred phrases, were used with a scorn for periphrasis, and an absence of an affectation of repentance so complete, that the reader's admiration and detesta-

tion of the writer seemed to grow side by side. "I was first led," wrote Garling, "to the contemplation of my crime by the ridiculous laxity which left all things in my power."

"Ah!" sighed Val, laying down the manuscript after rereading the opening passages, and that amongst them. "How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done!" He filled his glass again, and sat staring at the fire. There was a vinous glow at his heart, a vinous brightness in his brain. "I can't associate myself," said he proudly, "with a villain of that type. If I hold these papers an hour longer than I can help, I shall identify myself with Mr. Garling; an association I have no mind for." His decision was made at last. Gerard should have his own again, and Val would rely on the justice of Fortune to repay him for this sacrifice to honor. In the glowing warmth with which the generous vintage filled him, he had an easy presage of victory. Why should he be afraid of Lumby? he asked himself. Constance had never cared for the fellow, but had been persuaded into the match because it was socially a good one. She had cared for *him* —he knew it, though she had not confessed it, and had indeed in self-defense denied it. Taking it altogether, he, Val Strange, had acted very well, and was still acting very well. Lumby could find no reasonable fault with him now. He was genuinely sorry for Gerard's misfortune, and in his own sense of security he began to be genuinely glad that he could put a partial end to them. And indeed a quarter of a million sterling might well console a man for the loss of a prospective wife. Not in his own case, of course. That would have been an absurd suggestion. Val, never having felt the want of money, had a noble scorn for it. He threw it about with a splendid recklessness and royal prodigality, though he never spent a quarter of his income, being innocent of expensive vices, and despising the card-table and the turf. But Gerard was poor, and the return of the money would compensate for much to him. And be that as it might, by all rules of love Val had a perfect right to try his fortune now.

He rang the bell and the old butler answered the summons. "My yacht," said Val, "is lying about three miles this side of Daffin Head. Supposing this"—indicating the bottle—"to be the paper-mill, and this"—indicat-

ing a cigar-box—"to be our present position, the yacht is here;" and he set down his wine-glass in a straight line beyond the bottle. "As straight beyond the mill as you can go. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the butler. "It'll be in Quadross Bay."

"That's it," said Val. "I had forgotten the name of the place. Send one of the fellows to the yacht in the morning to tell Richards to pack my things and come up at once. Have him here by half-past nine at the latest. I am going up to town in the morning."

"Very good, sir," returned the butler, and retired.

Jim the groom, being charged with the commission, saw his way to an unauthorized enjoyment; and putting dog-cart and horse together at once, drove to a certain hostel within half a mile of the little bay, and there meeting some of the yacht's crew, went aboard with them, and held high revel until one in the morning, by which time his master, with a comfortable sense of virtue on him, had just turned into bed. Jim the groom reappeared in due time with Val's body-servant and divers portmanteaus; and away went Val, body-servant, portmanteaus, and all, up to London, by earliest train from Brierham Station. He had learned from the butler that the Grange, like the Hall, was empty. He had no immediate means of learning Constance's whereabouts, but that could not be a difficult matter in London. Her father and her brother were probably at the Albany as usual, and there was Miss Lucretia to apply to. But first, with a feeling of magnanimity and honesty in his bosom which was refreshing after his late self-accusings, he sought his lawyer, and from him obtained the name and address of the legal adviser of the late firm of Lumby and Lumby. The legal adviser, who was a high-dried little man, extremely old, and dry and wrinkled, was by no means so sanguine of the restoration of the property as Val had been.

"Mr. Garling," he said, in explanation of his doubts, "has gone to Spain. The police can tell you so much about him. It is very probable that this is so much waste paper after all, giving us merely the melancholy satisfaction of knowing the truth. The English and continental journals gave news of the failure of the firm, and of Garling's flight, with some supposed enormous gains; and it is

quite on the cards that he may have renewed his hold upon the money—quite on the cards."

At this view, Val became so evidently depressed, that the lawyer proposed to set an end to doubt at once by a visit to the Bank and a telegraphed inquiry to the bankers at Madrid. Val assenting eagerly, the high-dried little man got into a cab and drove away with him without loss of time. Then again Val produced the wonderful papers and told his tale. The manager, having heard it through with great astonishment, wired at once, and promised to dispatch a messenger with tidings of the answer. Val arranged to call upon the lawyer at the hour of six, and went upon his own inquiries. First to the Albany, where he learned nothing. Mr. Jolly and his son were out of town, and since they had left no instructions for the forwarding of letters, were not expected to be long away. Next he repaired to Chesterfield Street, Mayfair, where Miss Lucretia's house was found deserted. Val knocked and rang, refusing to believe that his quest had ended in a no-thoroughfare; and at last, disheartened, got into his cab again, and was driven to his own chambers. Emerging thence, he took another hansom, and drove wildly about town, calling on everybody he knew to whom Reginald was known. He gained no more by this move than by the others. Streets were "up" on all hands; the faces of the houses were given up to the painters, and the pavements were planted thickly with scaffoldings and ladders. Nearly everybody was out of town, and Val met nobody who could give him the information he wished for. By the time at which his unavailing search was ended, he was due at the lawyer's, and hastened thither.

"No answer from Spain, yet," said the lawyer in response to his inquiries. "I have received a message from the manager, who promised to send me the news when it comes. It will be forwarded to him at his private residence, and he will wire to me. Will you wait?"

Val answered in the affirmative, and sat down. The minutes glided slowly by, more slowly than he had ever known them glide. Twilight began to fall; and the lamplighter, visible from the window, traveled round the square, leaving the lamps agleam behind him. The clerks had gone already; and the lawyer, having lit the gas, and drawn down the blinds, sat with his parchment face bent over a

parchment deed, and read and read and read, making pencil-notes in a book at his side, but never looking at the hand which wrote them. This proceeding getting to have something of an eerie look at last to Val's eyes, and an eerie effect upon his nerves, he begged leave of absence for a quarter of an hour.

"I shall be here for another hour at least, now that I have begun this," said the lawyer, "Go and dine by all means. Take your time."

Val let himself out, and stumbled down the dusky staircase. He did not care about dining; but, cigar in mouth, paced up and down the flagged border of the square, keeping watch upon the lawyer's door. About half an hour or so, he grew tired of this, and returned. The man of law admitted him, and set his parchment face above the parchment deed again. The place became so silent, that Val could hear his own watch ticking. An hour went by drearily, and the parchment being done with, was folded, put into a tin case and locked up in a tin box, and the lawyer lowered his lamp. "Something the matter with the wires," he said, composedly. "Suppose we give them to half-past nine. What do you say?"

Val said "Yes" to that; and they sat on in silence.

"Do you mind this twilight?" asked the old man, after a great gap of time had been crossed. "It rests my eyes."

"Not at all," Val answered; and again they sat in silence. Rumors of the life of the streets reached them now and then; at times a footstep coming nearer made the watchers prick their ears and listen; twice a footstep paused outside and went on again. At last, upon the very limit of the time, and when the lawyer had already reached out his hand for his overcoat, the sound of a hurried footstep and a cheerful whistle coming near arrested it. The outstretched hand changed suddenly from its first intent, and without moving a muscle, enjoined silence. The step paused before the outer door, and the whistle ceased; and then, as though paid in proportion to the noise he made, and wildly anxious to increase his salary, the owner of the step plunged upstairs and battered at the door. The old man responded, received a telegram, turned up the lamp, put on his spectacles, opened the envelope, all with aggravating slowness, drew forth the inclosure, and read it. Then suddenly flashing from an old man to a young one, he strode

across with outstretched hand and slapped Val on the shoulder.

"You have done it, sir! The money is safe. That scoundrel hasn't got it after all." The parchment face was flushed, and the old eyes were moistened. "I didn't dare to hope it," said the old fellow. "I declare, sir, I am as much rejoiced as if the money were my own."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I HAD THE PLEASURE OF MEETING YOU, SIR, ONE HOT DAY LAST SUMMER, WHEN YOU PAID ME THIS IDENTICAL HALF-SOVEREIGN.

GERARD, grasping Hiram tightly by both arms, faced him beneath the gaslight. Hiram scarcely understanding as yet who had got hold of him, faced Gerard. The two looked at each other curiously.

"I reckon, mister," said Hiram, "that you've made some sort of error."

Gerard seemed to be of that opinion too, if his face were trustworthy. As to who Hiram might be, he had not, at that moment, the remotest notion.

"Perhaps I have," he answered, with a touch of dubious sarcasm in his tone. "We shall see." He released Hiram, and warned him. "Stand there. If you attempt to make a move, I'll throw you out of the window."

"Then," responded Hiram, "I will not attempt to make a move. Your diggings air too lofty." He kept his eyes on Gerard, but stooped for his hat warily, and, having secured it, brushed it with his elbow, and put it on, a little on one side. Gerard, regarding him, stepped sideways to the letter-box, and took out the packet. He knew by the look and feel of it what it was, but he was in a mood to do strict justice. He opened the package, therefore, and found the half-crown in it, and the inscription on the paper, as before.

"Now," he asked, tossing the half-crown on the table, and looking dangerously at Hiram, "who set you to do this? Don't prevaricate with me, or I'll break every bone in your body. Tell me who sent you here with these inso-

lent messages." Hiram returned no answer, but held him with his glittering eye, watchful of every movement. "Out with it!" cried Gerard.

"Keep your hair on," returned Hiram, in a tone of soft expostulation. "You're in no hurry to get bald." Gerard made a swift motion toward him. Hiram made a swifter in retreat. The two being on either side a round table of considerable size, it was not easy to get at close quarters, unless both were so minded. Hiram, in his flight, contrived to possess himself of a poker, and held it in an attitude of defense; improvised and amateurish, but unpleasant for an assailant to look at. Gerard, even in his heat of anger, recognized the loss of dignity inevitably accruing to a chase around the circular table, and stood still, devising means of approach. Hiram took advantage of this pause, and prepared to offer suasive counsel. "This is not a reception," he began, "calcoolated to feed the enthoosiasm of affection." At that second Gerard vaulted the table, closed with him, and wrested the poker from his grasp. Hiram, more fortunate than in their first encounter, eluded his hold, but left a portion of his coat behind. "Look here!" said Hiram from the other side of the table, "you ridicalous madman. What do you mean by it?"

"Who sent you here?" cried Gerard again.

"Nobody sent me here."

"What do you mean by dropping these confounded things in my letter-box three nights running? Who are you?"

"Now," responded Hiram, in soothing tones, "this *is* reasonable. If you'll put that poker down and listen to reason, I'll explain. And if you won't, and will insist on strife, I ain't goin' to let you maul me how you like—mind that. I'm loath to hurt you, and bein' a sensible man myself, I am not hungry to be hurt. You don't know me?"

"I don't know you from Adam."

"I am not Adam. I had the pleasure of meeting you, sir, ten miles from Brierham, one hot day last summer, when you paid me this identical half-sovereign for carrying a note to Valentine Strange, Esquire."

"Well?"

"Well. You may remember I told you that you had given me the only streak of luck I had ever had since I landed on these shores. You may recall likewise, that I

remarked if ever you were in a real hole, you might do worse than apply to Hiram Search."

"Well?" This reiterated inquiry began to assume a dogged and threatening tone.

"I am beginning to see," continued Hiram, "that thistles are my proper diet. I own up straight, that if anybody had offered me help on the sly like this, I should have rode rusty with him. But if you think that my half-crowns are so plentiful that I can afford to play jokes with 'em, you are prob'ly a greater ass than I am. Mister, let me lay it out straight for you. You helped me, when you was that squeezed in with money you could hardly move. Then I happened to read in the papers about Garling—I won't distress you if I can help it—then you happened to come and dine at my employer's restaurant—I was that mud-headed— Well, now, between man an' man, you can't ask more. I'm sorry I offended. You can call me anything you like, if it relieves you. I deserve to be kicked, though I should not, as a friend, advise you, or any man to kick me. I apologize with all my heart; and if you fancy that I am mean enough to have offended you willingly, you do me a greater wrong, sir, than I have offered you."

There was positively a real dignity in Hiram's tone as he concluded. His manner was conciliatory, frank, independent, yet submissive, as became his apology.

But Gerard was an Englishman, and was not going to be conciliated all on a sudden by any man alive. "Couldn't you guess, you blundering idiot," he said roughly, "that you could do nothing more offensive, nothing more insulting?" He was very favorably impressed with Hiram, or he would not have bestowed a word upon him.

The other felt a sort of amity in the rough words and tones, and half unconsciously advanced to meet it. "Let me make my excuses as clear as I know," he said. "It's partly the smallness of the sum that aggravates the natural feelings of the British aristocrat." Gerard laughed outright, his first laugh for six weeks. "It is indeed," said Hiram. "Seriously, now, it is. There never was anything I tried to do with my fingers I couldn't manage, worse or better; but in respect to feelings, I haven't got a sense of touch at all, and that's a fact. But now, look here! I am real grieved, but— Look here! Don't you

mind me because I can't grease it and make it run smooth, and scent it and make it smell nice. You helped me, and you told me a lie when you did it. Yes, sir. Says you: 'I've got no silver, dern it all; and I saw the shine of silver in your purse. Then says you again: 'I suppose you don't earn half-a-sovereign so easy every day;' and you put that rather harsh, to save my feelings and make me think it wasn't charity. I've thought of that often; and I've said to myself: 'Send that man round to me if ever he's in trouble, and I am game to my bottom dollar.' I have not your sense of touch, sir, in these matters, but I was deeply grateful, and I've had a liking for you ever since. I took a foolish way of showin' it, and hurt your feelings. But now, I've apologized, and you have looked over my clumsiness, and now—clean straight—I'm worth five pound. Is half of that any use to you?"

"My good fellow," said Gerard, haughtily, "you are quite mistaken in supposing that I am in want of money. If I were, I should find other means of getting it, than by taking your earnings from you." He was somewhat touched, in spite of his hauteur. Perhaps he was a little loftier in manner because he *was* touched, and did not care to show it. He read incredulity in Hiram's face; and to put an end to his doubts, he sent his hand into his pocket and drew out a mingled handful of gold and silver. "I am not in immediate danger of starvation," he said lightly and in a kindlier tone. Hiram felt the friendliness of this revelation, instinctively, He did not stop to think it out, but he knew that Gerard would rather have submitted to any misapprehension than clear it in this way unless at the bidding of an impulse altogether friendly. "You are a good fellow, Search," said the gentleman, reaching out his right hand. "You misunderstood my position—that was all."

Hiram pushed out his lean claw at arm's-length and executed a solemn shake-hands.

"I am glad to see," he answered, "that I am not such an ass as I thought I was. You laughed just now when I called you an aristocrat. But I was not mistaken."

Gerard laughed again. "This open expression of opinion is a little embarrassing, Mr. Search."

"I beg your pardon," said Hiram gravely; "I will not offend again. I have not your sense of touch, sir. I am

not an educated man, and I am not acquainted with the ways of society. But I will not offend again."

"What have you been doing since I saw you last?" asked Gerard, anxious to atone for his misunderstanding of Hiram's gratitude. The man's downright simplicity and truthfulness attracted him. Hiram began to tell his story. Neither of them noticed that the outer door had all this time been left unfastened, until, in the midst of Hiram's narrative, a great hammering began upon it, and Gerard, arising to open it, met Val Strange and the lawyer in the lobby.

"Mr. Lumby," said the old lawyer, directly he set eyes upon him, "let me congratulate you! We have recovered everything that villain Garling ran away with. You are a wealthy man once more." This was a burst of singular indiscretion for so discreet a man; but the old boy had had the news pent in him for ten minutes; he had been a dear friend and old school-fellow of Gerard's grandfather; he had been his father's adviser this thirty years past or nearly; and he was more puffed out and explosive with joy and triumph than a legal authority of threescore years and ten can endure to be with safety.

The result of the communication thus made was alarming; and Gerard, beneath the little gaslight in the lobby, turned so pale, and made so blind a clutch at the door-post, that the lawyer caught him on one side and Val Strange on the other, and led him back into the room, where he sunk into a chair, hid his face in his hands, and sobbed hysterically.

"Really, my dear Gerard," said the little old lawyer, standing over him, patting his shoulder, and trying to cover his own error by disregarding the effect it had upon the other, "we must have a little jollification on the strength of this discovery. Really we must. Perrier-Jouet must flow for this, sir. Pommery-Greno? the life-blood of the Widow Clicquot? what shall it be?" All this time he was patting and smoothing away at Gerard's shoulder. "Mr. Strange," he cried, not ceasing this friendly attention for a minute, "we ought to have supplied ourselves upon the way. It is all due to our friend Mr. Strange, under Providence, that this amazing discovery was made, Gerard. Your friend Mr. Strange is answerable for it. Come, come, come; you'll get up and say 'Thank you' to

Mr. Strange, surely. A quarter of a million is worth saying 'Thank you' for. Come, come, come." Running on thus, to cover Gerard's confusion and his own, he patted and soothed until Gerard raised a pale face and looked around him.

"What hit me," he said, "was the thought of the poor old governor. If it all came back, it would be too late for him."

"No, no, no!" cried the little lawyer. "Let us hope not—let us hope not. Let us trust in Providence. He will recover, and spend many happy years, I trust — many, many happy years." And that ancient lawyer, in spite of his face of parchment, and the legal inner dust of fifty years, sat down and wept for joy. In all his threescore years and ten he had known no greater grief than the fall of the great House. A placid equable life of threescore years and ten, with a little love-making in it, so far back that his old love's grandchildren were common councilmen, and nothing to mark its even tenor since those far-off days, but two strong friendships. The two dearest friends he had ever had were Gerard's grandfather and father. Why should he not feel a touch of sacred, friendly love again? But the old man's emotion killed Gerard's, so far as show was concerned at least. The two young men shook hands with each other and with the lawyer; and he, conscious of human frailty, made great efforts, and pulled himself together, and the three sent out for wine, and made bright speeches, and tried to be merry—with the ghosts about them. Constance for Val's ghost. Gerard's father with wrecked intellect and blighted life for the old lawyer's. Both for Gerard, and his pale mother seated between the two. And so the wine ran dull somehow in spite of its sparkle, and suddenly Gerard, in his attempt to be gay, bethought him of Mr. Search, and made inquiry for him. Hiram had disappeared.

Hiram indeed was by this time in his own lodgings, pulling at the black clay by the side of a guttering tallow candle. "I am glad of his luck," he said heartily, "and it's a sort of weight off me somehow that Mary's father has dropped that ill-got load. I'd have liked to have congratulated him; but I daren't stop for a word. It might pay a waiter too well to look honest, to congratulate a millionaire, when you've just lend him seven and sixpence."

When a second bottle had been opened, and one libation poured to Fortune, the lawyer took his leave, and the two young men remained together. Val was very bitter inwardly, and Gerard's thanks were wormwood to him. Gerard was all gratitude and grief and hope, a very compound of contradictory emotion; Val, all rage, watchfulness, and despair. In his weakness, he was for a moment enraged at his own fealty to honor. Why should he have played such a card as he held into Gerard's hands, until he was sure of his own end? He was keenly on the watch to draw forth or catch the news of Constance's whereabouts. He half despaired of winning now, for he had cast the winning card away, and so for once he drank deeply, talking the while with a feverish attempt at gayety, and pushing the conversation, whenever he could, in the direction of Gerard's hopes. For a long time, nothing came of this, but at last Gerard said: "I shall cross to Paris to-morrow, after seeing the governor."

"Ah!" responded Val, with well-concealed interest. "What is going on there?"

"Why," said simple Gerard, "you know of course that when this smash came, I was engaged to be married. That went by the board, with everything else. And now it's the only thing I care for, that it sets me right in that respect again. We shall have to divide with my cousins, of course—the poor old governor is out of it forever, I am afraid—but I shall have enough left. You heard what was said just now. Their share is not more than fifty thousand apiece. That leaves a hundred and thirty-three thousand to the governor, and the old house and my mother's property, besides what is saved from the smash. We are as well off as ever, thanks to you, old fellow. We haven't as much money, of course, but we have more than we shall ever want to spend."

"And so you're going to Paris to-morrow?" said Val, bringing the conversation round again. It was horrible to listen to Gerard's talk of certainty, but he must listen, to learn what he wanted to know.

"Yes," said Gerard. "I shall see my mother in the morning, and break the news to her, and see the governor, and then cross over."

"Are they all staying there?" asked Val, pouring out a glass of wine, and pressing the neck of the bottle tightly

against the glass, to prevent them from clanking in his agitated hands.

"Yes," responded Gerard. "Constance has not been well lately, and Miss Jolly—that's her aunt, you know—insisted on going to Paris for a change."

"Where are they?" asked Val. His voice veiled his own tremor and despair so ill that he was almost amazed to see it go unnoticed.

"At the Grand Hotel," Gerard answered; and being no further questioned, slipped into silence.

Val sat on thorns awhile, and then took leave. Once in the street, he ran until he found a hansom, and was driven to his chambers at full speed. His luggage was undisturbed. He bade his man carry it out to the hansom, and side by side with his valet, drove to St. Katherine's Docks. The boat for Boulogne started that night at eleven-thirty, and was caught at the moment of departure. An eighteen hours' passage would land him at Boulogne at half past five, in time for the six o'clock slow train for Paris. Even that gave him some faint hope of seeing Constance before she retired for the night. Gerard, starting on the morrow, would leave Charing Cross at half past seven in the evening, would reach Paris at six in the morning, and would possibly go to bed to snatch a few hours' sleep. There loomed another chance.

Half the gloomy night Val paced the deck; and at last, with a great-coat and a rug, lay down upon it, beneath the clouds and the solemn rifts between them sown with earnest stars. There was but half an hour to win by, and the thought kept him awake, in a panic of hope and fear. Slowly the stars faded; the intense depths of sky grew gray; the clouds, which had been gray, grew black; the bleak sunlight touched the sulky Channel billows. He rose again, and paced the deck, and looked at the Kentish coast, still in sight, and sickened for the journey's end. All day long time crawled, and his veins fevered, and his watch seemed to stand still. But five o'clock saw Boulogne harbor; and then, whilst the hands of the watch suddenly ran with great rapidity, the boat seemed to crawl on the water. Half past five, and the harbor scarcely seemed nearer. At six minutes to six they moored beside the port, but on the wrong side for the railway-station. Seven minutes later

Val stood upon the platform, and looked after the last carriage of the retreating train.

He waited, with racked patience, for the next train. Perhaps, after all, Gerald might miss it—might somehow be delayed. The slow, deliberate seconds, the leaden-footed minutes, the dreary, dreary hours, went by. The mail-train drew up at the platform, and he took his seat. Everything was silent, and the place seemed asleep, until the sudden flare of gas, and the sudden rush of storming feet, told of the arrival of the mail passengers. He would not look to see if Gerard were there or not. Fortune had been against him all along, and would be against him still. He set up the big collar of his traveling-coat, and pulled his cap down upon his eyes, to escape a possible recognition. The clamor and bustle died away on the platform. The signal sounded. The carriage answered with a jerk to the first motion of the engine, and at that instant a passenger opened the door of the compartment in which Val sat, and leaped in lightly. It was Gerard Lumby.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"DID THE RETURN OF ONE OF HER LOVERS PLEASE HER, EVEN THOUGH HE WERE NOT THE CHOSEN?"

WITH no more than a casual glance at his solitary traveling companion, Gerard folded himself in his rug and disposed himself to sleep. Val found the situation eminently trying. He had made a sacrifice to honor on the clear and definite understanding that he was not to lose by it. It was a direct bid for a bargain with Fate, and Fate had declined to accept the bond of the bargain. He was positively losing by his sacrifice after all, and for once in a way honesty was not the best policy. It is undeniable that Honor is a hard mistress to such as serve her with divided hearts. She will have everything her own way, or—she punishes. She will not tolerate anything done for reward. She is the desert of reward, and not the payment of it. Val had obeyed her with a divided loyalty, and was already far on the track of repentance. Mr. Charles Reade says, with that savage incisiveness which belongs to him, that our truest repentances are reserved for our best actions. That is a hard

and bitter saying; but there is truth in it, if it is not altogether true: and here was Val bewailing himself that he had not held the master-card and played it, though the Knave's face grinned from the card-board. If honor's path were smooth, would we not all rather tread it than otherwise? Who will invent some scheme of self-sacrifice-made-easy and invite us all to purchasable saintship? No man elects to be a rogue, for the sake of being one. To despise one's self is no luxury.

If you desire to know how all the obstacles he met with swelled Val's passion, you may find for yourself a world-old illustration by dropping an impediment in the first country streamlet or town gutter you may come to. How the small stream suddenly swells and rages! Do but grant that its source may not dry up, and that you go on building up impediments, and out of any village runlet you may secure a flood which, breaking loose at last, will sweep away houses. And Val's love, which, if its current had run smoothly, might have been a placid stream enough, had long since grown torrent-like and overwhelming.

Gerard had been in his way all along, but now he barred Val's physical egress from this unpleasant corner. Placidly sleeping, he stretched his legs from one seat to the other, and there was no getting past him without the chance of recognition; and Val, for his own purposes, was anxious not to be recognized. Constance was free to accept the proffer of any man's hand, and Val was of course equally free to make proffer of his own; but it was natural that he should not care to be met by his rival on a journey which had that end in view. The train made its customary stoppages, and at each of them he would willingly have escaped to another carriage; but he did not choose to venture on the experiment. In spite of his loss of sleep the night before, Gerard's presence kept him awake, and at every stir the sleeper made, he fixed his protecting collar anew and gave a tug at his traveling-cap. But the sleeper went on sleeping to the journey's end, and therein took another unconscious advantage, of which Val was conscious. Suddenly determined not to be recognized, Val coiled himself in his corner until Gerard had gathered up his belongings and had left the carriage. But if he were to preserve his presence as a secret, he must seek another hotel than that in which Constance and Gerard would alike be domiciled, and thus

would he be at a new disadvantage. Well, then, he would accept the chance of observation, and with this resolve he followed into the Grand Hotel, and after a bath, sat down to write a note, informing Constance of his presence, and begging her most urgently to see him.

In the meantime, Gerard, having made his toilet, had already shaken hands with Mr. Jolly and with Reginald. He had not been aware of the race against a rival; but he had wired that he was coming, and they had both arisen early to meet him. Mr. Jolly was prepared to protect his daughter from any renewed proposals from the bankrupt lover. Reginald was ready if need were to come in as a moral buffer between the forces which seemed certain to attack each other. The elder man was posed in an attitude of conscious dignity when Gerard entered. The lad's face was radiant as he came in, and he advanced with both hands outstretching.

"Congratulate me!" were his first words. "Everything that fellow Garling ran away with is recovered!" Mr. Jolly's attitude of dignity went suddenly to pieces, and he was all amazement. Gerard told the story briefly, and explained exactly how matters stood. He told by what strange accident the missing papers had been discovered; and at the mention of Val Strange's name, the younger listener hid himself behind his eyeglass and gave vent to an expressive whistle, which neither of the others noticed. Mr. Jolly had a good deal to think of, and not a great deal of time in which to turn it over. The firm would start again, so Gerard said, in answer to inquiry: everybody had been paid to the uttermost farthing; the news of the recovery of the stolen capital would be bruited abroad; and the House would stand as well as ever in the eyes of the world. That was all well; but in the meantime Gerard was undoubtedly many thousands poorer than he had been. Still, at his father's death he would have everything—a hundred and thirty thousand pounds, a noble house and a fine park, his mother's fortune—whatever that might amount to—and a share in the profits of the rehabilitated firm. Yes—perhaps he might risk assent again. Constance was fretting a good deal, and Mr. Jolly had a hundred times declared that women were incomprehensible. She had treated the man as if he had been one icicle and she another, whilst she was sure of marrying him; and now

that she had lost what apparently she had never cared for, she was moping and melancholy, and in love with solitude. The girl was evidently grieving for him. Let her have him back. Poor Mr. Jolly's life had been a burden these six weeks. From the hour of her mother's death, Constance's future had been a trouble to him; and just when, with unexpected ease and good fortune, he had shelved the weight, and was prepared to enjoy the world—an unencumbered widower—she had come back upon him, and the brilliant engagement had ended in a tragical fiasco. Of course he did not guess that any other trouble weighed upon his daughter's mind, but the tears that seemed shed for Gerard were mainly shed for Val's desertion of her. She had not wept long, but a settled languor was upon her still, and the world seemed to have lost all charm and interest. When he had rapidly turned over such of these considerations as occurred to him, Mr. Jolly spoke.

"My dear Gerard," he said, in his Disraelian manner, "when you first approached me upon this question, I did myself the justice to assure you that I had but one object to achieve, and that that object was my daughter's happiness. If I had not thought you likely to promote the attainment of that object, I should never have encouraged you in your approach to her affections." The profane Reginald murmured "Hear! hear!" and his undertone was so ill-measured that the interruption was audible to his father. That ideal parent turned a glance of reproach upon him, and continued: "Approach to her affections. For I am not one of those who would consent to see marriage degraded to the level of a sordid tie, or reduced to the baseness of a business negotiation." He felt himself to be in fine oratorical form, and would have been glad to admit all English-speaking people then in Paris, that they might see how well he bore it off. There was always a shadowy audience in his mind when he laid himself out in the pursuit of conversational excellence. He felt now—in a nebulous, vague way, be it understood—as if he harangued the inhabitants of listening spheres, and that he was more like his model than common. "With that candor which has always seemed to me one of your most attractive characteristics, you tell me that your financial position is not altogether what it was. If the financial position"—he said this with a playful flourish and a smile

—"had been your only recommendation, that would have weighed against you. But, as matters stand, I resume my old position. I take a position of friendly neutrality, Gerard. You did not consult me when, in pursuance of the dictates of an honorable delicacy, you withdrew from your engagement; or perhaps I might have been unworldly and unwise enough to combat your resolve. You do me the honor to consult me now; but I waive all right of veto, and I refer you to the person most interested. I preserve my neutrality strictly, but I wish you well. I have no influence, or if I possess influence, I conceive that I exercise my parental duties best by refusing to exert it. God bless you!" Mr. Jolly suddenly and unexpectedly wrung Gerard's hand, and producing his handkerchief, gave it a solemn flourish and hid his countenance. It is probable that he had not the remotest notion of being a humbug. If he began by expressing his own magnanimity, he always ended by believing in it.

Gerard knew him better than of old; but he was not keen in observation; and he liked to believe in people; being himself of a most honest and faithful nature. So he returned the grip with interest, and left the model father's knuckles limp and aching. Reginald meanwhile smoothed his baldness with a doubtful grin, expressive of a sentiment half way between shame and amusement. And if he kept silence with respect to his father's emotion, it may be that he thought the more. His own congratulations were brief and hearty.

"Look here," he said; "I'll go and tell Constance you're here;" and with that intent he sped in search of Miss Lucretia's maid. It so happened that Val's servant was at the moment of Reginald's arrival on the scene in search of that damsel, being intrusted to deliver to her care his master's note. The wily youth saw him, and marveled. "Is Val here?" he asked himself. If he were there, it could be but for one object. Reginald's sympathies, like other things human, were liable to fluctuations. He had been moved by Val's distress when he parted with him; but he had been moved since then by the tremendous calamities which had fallen upon Gerard. Val had not acted altogether well in pursuing Constance after her engagement to Gerard; whilst his rival had borne himself, to Reginald's mind, splendidly, beneath misfortunes almost

unexampled. So that now the balance of Reginald's sympathies was with Gerard. But bethinking himself that Strange had had it in his power to delay his rival's good fortune, he appreciated his honor at the full, and being thus tugged by both, he decided not to interfere with either. "Let 'em both fight it out between 'em," he said viciously. But by intercepting Miss Lucretia's maid, he interfered without knowing it. "Is my sister up?" he asked.

"Oh yes, sir," the maid responded; "she took coffee half an hour ago."

"Did she, my dear?" he returned with a fatherly air. "Well, it's no use for me to make love to you, because I know the noble Duke your father won't let you marry out of the Harrystocracy, and I'm as poor as Job. So just you run and tell her that I want to see her. Will you? There's a darling!"

The damsel murmured something, of which "Imperence" alone was audible, and departed on her errand with an air of scorn. But being out of sight, she stopped to giggle.

"They're very nice," said the bald-headed young man, putting up his glass to look after her—"they're very nice, all of 'em, but are they worth the trouble we take about 'em?"

The maid returned before he had found an answer to that query. "Miss Constance says you will see her in her dressing-room."

"I'll say nothing at all about Val," Reginald decided as he entered his sister's room. Constance sat at the window, and looked at him with a languid and uninterested air as he entered. To her surprise, he kissed her before sitting down. "Con, my dear," he said, "I have news for you. Who do you think is here?"

"I never cared for riddles," she answered. "Who is here?"

"Gerard came from London this morning. He has recovered all the stolen money, and is nearly as well-off as ever. He wants to see you. Will you come to him?"

Now, this was not altogether leaving the rivals to fight it out between themselves; but then you and I are not the only inconsistent people in the world. He was beginning to get interested in spite of himself. Constance was very pale of late, but at this news a gentle color stole to her

cheek. Did the return of one of her lovers please her, even though he were not the chosen? The six weeks and more which had gone since Val's departure had not left her unchanged. For six weeks she had been free and lonely. Val had expatriated himself, and at his going, she had done her deliberate best to root him from her heart. Then she had pitied Gerard, and had felt more kindly to him since his misfortunes. She had seen his honest clear gray eyes clouded with the agony of his sorrows. She had thought often of that despairing gesture with which he had turned away from her, and the eloquent cry, low yet terrible, with which he had released her. She did not love him; but she was not devoid of pity, and she was left alone. And operating with these factors of pity and loneliness was the fact of his former claim. Had the two men stood side by side, she would not have chosen Gerard. But the man she would have chosen had gone away on purpose to forget her, and she had schooled herself to know it. She remembered how deeply interested her father had been in Gerard's success, and supposed the interest renewed. In these late days, life had had neither salt nor savor. And so in brief she resigned herself, and when Reginald asked his question, she responded "Yes," and arose languidly, yet with a little blush upon her cheek, born of I know not what emotion.

She was dressed in some light-colored diaphanous stuff which had soft and graceful folds, and she wore just a touch of warmer color at the throat. To Gerard's eyes as she approached him, her pallor and her languor lent her a new beauty. But he had never seen her without thinking that she looked more beautiful than ever. And now he was lover all over, and trouble vanished, and care took flight. He kissed her hand, purely and simply because he could not help it, despite the presence of her father and her brother. Mr. Jolly made a second oration in parliamentary form. Reginald left the room to escape it, and neither Gerard nor Constance paid much heed to it—Gerard, because he was filled with his own happiness; nor Constance, because her father's heavy solemnity of platitude was always wearisome. Pleasantly unconscious of this tacit disdain, the model father flowed along. He took Constance's approval for granted, and evidently regarded a renewal of the engagement, under the conditions, as a

thing needing his own consent and nothing more. She had supposed that this was his view of the affair; and, for her —what did it matter? By and by the model parent, having sufficiently aired himself, withdrew, and there came an hour which made Gerard an atonement for his griefs. He knelt at Constance's side with both her hands in his, and eloquent for once in his life, he told her how more than happy he was, and how more than wretched he had been.

"And you have grieved for me too," he murmured, kissing her hands again and again. A man whose scholarship goes no further than the Latin quotations at the end of a pocket-edition of Johnson, knows—*Credula res amor est.* She was pale, and ah! it was sweet to think, she had grown pale in grieving for him, so sweet he could but think it. And she would give no denial. Why should she pain him? He had suffered, and he loved her, and it was in her power to make him happy, and it was worth something in a world so forlorn to be able to make anybody happy. And let not the male reader accept this as a commonplace. It was proof of a nature which was at bottom indubitably noble. For, as a rule, a woman—as the greatest Englishwoman of this century has told us—discerns not a sex as we do, but an individual. She loves one—one who belongs to her; she has no passion for humanity. Loving Dick, she deifies him, but is quite contemptuous about Tom and William, who are all round ten times better fellows; and should Tom or William make love to her, she snubs him, and despises him for it. That Dick loves her, is Dick's glory and her own; but a planetful of outside males might kneel and she deride. It was, then, anything but a feminine trait in Constance that she listened with pity and yielding to the love-tale of a man she did not love. Her hands were cool in his grasp. Her pulse beat no faster because of his kisses and his vows. Since Fate resigned her to him, she would be true to him; and if she could make him happy, it was something. But she—had she ever been happy? Would she ever be happy any more?

Then, not to break, but to continue Gerard's dream, came breakfast. It was his first happy meal for so long, and it *is* true, as John Dryden sung, "sweet is pleasure—sweet is pleasure after pain."

"I protest," said Reginald, scrutinizing a cutlet, and appropriating it, "that I feel Arcadian. Let us go and

picnic somewhere. It is going to be a lovely day. Let us go to St. Cloud or to the Bois. Let us go to the Bois, and take a hamper, and lunch in the shade like M. Lebon Epicier and his house on a summer Sunday. Eh, governor? What do *you* say, Aunt Lucretia?"

"Let us go to St. Cloud by all means," returned the old lady. She was in a condition of tremulous happiness at Constance's recovery of her lover, and had already taken a fancy to Gerard. To be sure, his affairs were no longer colossal, which was of itself a pity, but he was so big and genial, so bright and tender and devoted, that her heart warmed to him.

"Shall we go, Constance?" asked Mr. Jolly.

"By all means," said Constance, trying to look as if the proposal pleased her.

"I haven't seen St. Cloud since I was a boy," said happy Gerard. So the jaunt was reckoned settled. The sleeping- and dressing-rooms occupied by Mr. Jolly and his son were *en suite* with the breakfast-room, but the ladies slept at the end of the corridor. Constance gave her arm to Miss Lucretia, and the faded old woman aud the beautiful girl went out together, making a pretty picture. The rooms Val Strange had taken opened on that corridor, and he saw them as they passed his open door. All this time whilst Gerard had been happy, Val had been waiting in suspense, and torturing himself with fears, which were better grounded even than he feared, for his hopes fought them half down, and would not give them sway. Two minutes later, Gerard passed, elate, with his head high and a radiant smile upon his face, humming *La donna e mobile.* The broad staircase faced Val's door, and Gerard went springing up it three steps at a time.

"He has won!" cried Val, wildly; and with a savage gesture, he slammed the door, and cast himself into a chair. The very carriage of Gerard's figure bespoke triumph; the gay air he hummed, the smile upon his face, sung triumph! "Won? Has he won? He laughs best who laughs last, and I will win or die. She does not care for him. Fool that I was to run away! Had I stayed in England, she would have been mine by now, and no man could have come between us. Oh, Constance! Not a word yet? not a line? Do you know that I am here?"

When Constance reached her own room, Miss Lucretia's

maid presented her with a note. The handwriting was not known to her; and turning first to the signature, she was seized with a sudden tremor, so that the very paper rustled in her hand. The maid looked at her curiously. "You may attend your mistress," said Constance, quietly. "I shall not trouble you this morning."

Mr. Jolly, after the failure of Lumby and Lumby, had begun to retrench. He had spent a good deal of money on the strength of Constance's engagement, and when it seemed that nothing was to come of it, he retrenched. With Mr. Jolly, retrenchment naturally tended to the docking of other people's little comforts rather than his own, and one of his economic measures was to refuse vote of supply for Constance's maid.

"I returned to England two days ago," ran the note, beginning thus abruptly and without preface, "and learned that you were free. I should have been here a day sooner, but I waited to restore Gerard's fortune to his hands. I could not rob him of everything. I will explain this when I see you. You will let me see you for a moment? You know my love already. I can speak now without dishonor, and can tell you that I love you still, that I have loved you from the hour I first saw you, and shall love you to the last hour of my life. You know all this already. I have waited, and I have despaired; but new hope brings new pain. Forgive me if I seem to say too much, or if I seem to say it too unguardedly. Yours, V. S."

She sat for a long time over these impassioned words. To you or to me they may seem no more than words, and "like a tale of little meaning, though the words are strong." But eloquence is in the ears that hear more than the tongue that speaks, and with every word she read—true sign of love—she heard Val's voice pleading in it. He had been so near, after all; and in place of mere cold duty, she might have had love and no breach of duty with it, had she been spared from Gerard for but two hours. Her tears fell heavily upon the paper, like the drops that fall at the beginning of a storm. She kissed the honeyed, cruel words that told of the love she longed for; and suddenly starting up, she thrust the letter in her bosom, and began to dress. She would tell Gerard how unhappy she was, and beg him to release her. Her plighted word of half a year since still bound her after this morning's tacit reacceptance of the

bond. But Gerard was a man, and a man of honor. He would release her if she claimed release, and she would claim it. She could almost love him if he let her go.

Her mind being made up to this, she recurred to the mysterious phrases in Val's letter—"I waited to restore Gerard's fortune to his hands. I could not rob him of everything." Being unable to find any meaning for them, she sought her aunt's room. "Aunty, dear," she said, "I have not heard how the fortune came back again. Can you tell me?"

"I am not a business woman, my dear," said Miss Lucretia, whose gray locks were just then in the hands of her maid; "but, as I understand the matter from your father, a friend of Mr. Lumby's found the money—a Mr. Grainger. I wonder if he were one of the Essex Graingers? I knew the Essex Graingers years ago. They were very prying people, and quite likely to find anything that was hidden anywhere."

"Was it not Mr. Strange who found the money?" asked Constance—"Mr. Valentine Strange?"

"Was it?" cried the old lady. "Valentine? What a stupid way of speaking your father has, my dear. He puts *er* at the end of everything. Oh yes, my dear. Of course it was Valentine Strange. He has a paper-mill. Oh yes, of course. And he found the money in bank-notes—a million pounds' worth, only some of it belongs to other people—and the poor mad gentleman is supposed to have hidden them in the waste paper after the other gentleman had stolen them. Although of course it is absurd to speak of *him* as a gentleman. I am so glad to know that it was Valentine Strange."

Constance was not greatly enlightened as to the history of the case, but she understood enough. Val would not rob Gerard of his fortune for an hour, or take away his chance of an appeal to her. "He shall not be unhappy," she said to herself, "because he has acted so nobly, and has waited to give his rival a chance before he spoke. How splendid of him! How manly! How chivalrous!"

She resolved anew that she would appeal to Gerard; but she had reckoned without herself, for when he and she were left alone that day at St. Cloud, she could not find courage to speak. She put it off. She would write to him. It would be easier to write. And Val meantime went un-

answered, and saw them going away, and watched them, hours after, as they came in again, himself unseen. As Constance walked along the corridor to her room that night, Gerard overtook her at Val's door, and not guessing who waited and listened there, he said good-night with a tender triumph in his tone at which Val clinched his hands and maddened.

"Good-night, darling," said Gerard. "Can you guess how happy you have made me? Good-night."

"Good-night, Gerard," returned Constance. She wanted so much to propitiate him, she dreaded so much to give him pain, that her voice was tenderer than she knew. How could she be so cruel as to dismiss him? How could she be so cruel to herself and Val as not to dismiss him? Gerard with one foot on the staircase watched until the door closed behind her, and then went slowly up the stair. Val's pale face from his dark chamber door-way looked after him.

"She has left my note unanswered all day long," he moaned. "If I have been mistaken! If she loves him after all! If—"

CHAPTER XXXV.

"COMES OVER HERE TO SEE CON, AND FINDS HIMSELF TOO LATE."

CONSTANCE did not appear at the breakfast-table next morning; and Miss Lucretia, in answer to inquiries, shook her curls with a world of young-lady-like emphasis at Gerard, and declared that the poor darling was quite worn out by excitement, had passed a broken night, and was now happily asleep. Gerard was sheepishly discomfited by this intelligence, since he, in Miss Lucretia's eyes, was the evident source of mischief. The old lady sat but a little time at breakfast, and withdrew to keep watch and ward over the sleeper. To her surprise, the young lady was seated in her peignoir at a table, writing. She huddled away the paper guiltily on her aunt's entrance, and locked it in a writing-desk.

"You silly child," said Aunt Lucretia with mild severity, "you will spoil him if you write to him every half hour when you can not see him. Go to bed. You are quite

flushed. You have had a bad night, and you must sleep. I shall bring my work here, and sit beside you until you do it. And I shall keep guard over you until you are fit to get up again."

The lovely defaulter made no answer to this rebuke, but crept into bed submissively, and after a time, feigned sleep. She was glad that her aunt suspected nothing. The note had not been intended for the accepted lover, but for Val Strange. To be compelled to stillness, to lie unbound, yet fettered by the eye of affectionate watchfulness, whilst the storm of feeling heaves the soul, and the soul strives to stir the body as the wind heaves the sea, to suffer the torments of anxiety, of remorse, of despised or unfruitful love, and yet to feign sleep and make no sign, is an agony added to an agony.

Miss Lucretia stuck to her post gallantly, and embroidered and watched with much combined industry and vigilance. She was of course without an idea of the restraint her presence inflicted, and in her kindly heart regarded herself as an unmixed blessing. Val in the meantime was settling down into the waters of despondency; but before absolutely surrendering himself for lost, he determined to make one more essay. So he wrote again; and this time, fearing and almost hoping that the last note might have miscarried, he gave the bearer definite instructions.

"You are sure you know Miss Jolly's maid, Richards?"

"Yes, sir," said Richards. He was a romantic middle-aged person, a little given to drink in lonely hours, and much addicted to the perusal of imaginative literature of a certain type. He had been known to weep above his whisky-and-water and the woes of Lady Ella, in that tender romance "Her Golden Hair," in the "Boudoir Journal;" and he was beginning in his ridiculous old head to make romances for his employer, and was interested in the intrigue. "I seen the young person once before at Miss Jolly's in town—the helder Miss Jolly, sir."

"Very well," returned his master. "Take that note and give it to the maid. Ask her to give it to Miss Jolly when she is alone—not the elder Miss Jolly, mind."

"Certainly not, sir," said the observant Richards. Val, who found the clandestine business oppressive, could almost have kicked the body-servant for his ready appreciation of the condition of affairs. Don Giovanni seems to have had

no compunctions about taking Leporello into consultation; and all Vanbrugh's dashing young gentlemen are at home in the confidence of their valets; but Val was a gentleman of nicer notions, and found no pleasure in imparting the secrets of his soul to Mr. Richards. He glared angrily, therefore, at that sympathetic menial, and briefly bidding him do as he was told, turned his back upon him. It is an old-world story that when the master marries the mistress, the man weds the maid, and Mr. Richards had lived until his time had come. Miss Lucretia's maid, now devoted chiefly to Constance's service, was a bright little brunette, with a pretty figure and a neat foot, a peachy cheek and sparkling eyes; and she wore that modest and becoming dress of female servitude which ladies might copy with advantage to their looks. If the thickset hazel were dying from Richards's topmost head, and the hateful crow had already trodden the corners of his eyes, he had still a heart, and he was still a bachelor. He had saved a little money. He knew of a public-house, a really respectable concern, in which, as landlord, it might be pleasant to settle down to the *otium cum dignitate*. The respectable concern would want a landlady to brighten it; and why—cried Richards's heart aloud within him—should this charming little creature not be rescued from the restraints of a servant's life? So Richards, bent on his master's prosperity, did also a little love-making on his own account. In short, like a good servant, he identified himself with his master's cause. But inexorable Fate makes no allowance for good intentions if you steer your bark on the rocks, and the valet's shipwreck involved the master's. Of all delusive coquettes, Fortune is the most delusive and the most coquettish, and she must needs at once throw little Selina in the way of romantic Richards. Now, it stood to reason that if Richards at once intrusted his master's note to the maiden's care, he would have less chance of prosecuting his own suit than if he delayed the delivery a little while.

"Good-morning, miss," said Richards.

"Good-morning," replied Selina; and since Richards occupied the greater part of the way, she stood still. Richards, like other people, began to find the art of conversation more difficult than he had fancied it. But it seemed altogether safe and politic to say that it was beautiful weather for the time of year. Selina agreed to that prop-

osition amiably enough, but evinced a discouraging desire to get by and go about her business.

"You hayen't been long in Paris, have you?" asked the middle-aged valet.

"Longer than you have, if it's the school of politeness they say it is," answered the maid. "You needn't take up the 'ole of the corridor."

"I shouldn't ha' stopped you, my dear," pleaded Mr. Richards, "only I'd got somethink important to say."

"Well, say it then," responded the damsel pertly. "*My dear*, indeed!"

In oratory, the best of all rules is to have something important to say, and to say it. But Richards was not an orator, and the appeal took him somewhat at a disadvantage. "Very good orators, when they are out, will spit," said Rosalind; "but for lovers, lacking matter, the cleanliest shift is to kiss." Mr. Richards had never studied Shakespeare; but he followed his recipe, or strove to follow it. But as, with the slow grace of middle age, he essayed to circle the jimp and taper form before him—with insinuating air, bent downward, and had almost won his purpose, swift and sudden the damsel slapped his face, first on one side and then on the other, and bounding past him, rapidly traversed the corridor and disappeared. The discomfited Richards prowled about in vain for a second sight of the scornful beauty. Little Selina might have resented his advances in any case; but it is within the narrator's knowledge that a gentleman out of livery who resided, when his master was in town, in Chesterfield Street, had saved a little money, and knew a public-house, and was of opinion that Selina would make a capital landlady. The Chesterfield Street gentleman had breathed his moving story in the maiden's ear! Selina was "engaged."

So Val's second note miscarried; and Richards, being interrogated, made false declaration concerning it, and said it was delivered, hoping, like others who have failed, to make failure good before he could be detected. All that day the wretched valet pervaded the corridor, with the note lying on his conscience like a weight, and once meeting Selina, implored her to stay but for a moment. But she, with head in air, went by; and he, like the parent in Mr. Campbell's poem, "was left lamenting." Then the miserable man, being a person of no resources, burned Val's

letter, and wrote by that evening's post in application for a vacant "place," and so prepared to escape the day of reckoning. He was the readier to do this that he was a bad sailor, and had been compelled to live at sea so much of late, that the possession of a stomach had become a burden to him.

No response to Val's second appeal. She scorned him, then? Had he not deserved to be scorned? She had told him that she did not care for him; and he, in his vanity, had believed, in spite of her protestations, that she loved him. Well—he was rightly served. So the cold fit followed the hot, and in due time again the hot fit followed the cold. He had been so desirous of escaping Gerard hitherto, that he had remained almost a prisoner; but now, growing reckless, he wandered uneasily about the building, and suddenly encountered Reginald. He professed great preoccupation of manner, hoping to go by unnoticed; but, being hailed, he turned, and, with well-acted surprise, cried: "Hillo! What brings *you* in Paris?"

"Oh, we're all here," returned Reginald, linking his arm in Val's. "I heard from Lumby that you had come back again. What an extraordinary chance by which you found those papers, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was curious," said Val, striving after a casual air—"very curious. And so you're all here, are you? How's the governor?"

"Oh, as usual," said the little man, with unfilial carelessness.

"And your sister?"

"Pretty well," was the answer. Reginald made no account of female headaches.

"You spoke of Gerard just now," said Val. "Is *he* here?"

"Of course," the little man responded—"of course. Directly you gave him the papers, he came racing over here. When that fellow Garling bolted and the smash came, the first thing Gerard did was to go to Constance and tell her about it, leaving her to cry-off. She has been a good deal cut up, and of course they've made it up again. Seen Chaumont in *Toto-chez-Tata?* No? It's the best thing here." Reginald, like the rest, had been misled by his sister. He had indeed had some clew to the maze in which she walked, but he had lost it. Her second accept-

ance of Gerard was unforced and spontaneous, and he supposed she was pleasing herself, and that Valentine Strange had been vain enough to deceive himself. But though he could not understand his sister, the little man was keen enough to make out his companion's condition. "Will you come to see Chaumont to-night?" he asked.

"No," said Val, hurriedly; "I am engaged. I must be off at once. How long do you stay here?"

"We leave to-morrow morning," said Reginald. "We should have gone back to-day, but for Gerard's coming."

"Remember me to all of them," said Val, lightly. "I must be off. Good-bye, old man. I shall see you in town shortly, I dare say." He shook hands with nervous haste, and ran rapidly down-stairs. The little man, drumming with his fingers on the top of his hat, looked after him thoughtfully.

"Didn't want to see me," he mused. "Walking languidly and apparently without a purpose when I met him, and in a dreadful hurry now. M-m-m. Hasn't got over it yet. Comes over here to see Con, and finds himself too late. I'm very sorry for him, poor beggar; but if ever I am taken like that, if ever I fall in love, I'll try to hide the symptoms; and if the young woman doesn't want me, I'll try my hardest not to want the young woman."

Val's persistence in a cause so evidently lost seemed a little disgraceful and unmanly, and even to Val himself it wore that complexion at times. The matter appeared to be growing hopeless enough now, and it seemed that Constance had resolved to hold no communication with him. If she were so resolved, Val was not yet so far gone that he could not see his way to the final cure of love. It was his belief that she had cared for him, which had so dangerously drawn him on all along; and he felt now that if he could but convince himself that he had been mistaken, he could go away and take his punishment like a man. But if he could, he would have a last glimpse of her before going forever into the desert. So he went to see *Toto-chez-Tata*, and sitting in a dusky corner of the house he watched for Constance. Had he looked to the stage and listened, he might have found a reason for her absence; but anyhow she did not come, and the fascinating Chaumont tripped and smiled and warbled, and Val heard nothing and saw nothing but misery and stupidity. Paris

laughed and applauded. Val for once thought the Parisian judgment nothing worth. Reginald was there alone, with no eyes for anything but the stage, and Strange got away unnoticed. He saw Mr. Jolly and his party leave the hotel next morning, and, himself unseen, watched Gerard and Constance as they drove away. In the evening, he disconsolately followed, and arriving in London, learned that they had all gone down to the Grange. Well, he would go to Brierham, and there might meet with her. Let him only learn that she was happy, and he would be content. The unsophisticated credulity of the human conscience is a thing to wonder at. All life long a man may lie to it, and it will believe him in spite of countless detections. Val's new fraud was harmless and natural enough. So much may be admitted.

In the course of their journey to London, Gerard and Reginald had a talk which resulted in a movement important to this story.

"Do you remember the first night we met?" asked Gerard.

"Yes," said Reginald. "It was at Val Strange's." He half sighed "Poor Val" under his breath; but Gerard, who had ears like a fox, overheard the exclamation.

"Why poor Val?" asked the unsuspicious Gerard. "What's the matter with *him?*"

"That's his secret," said the little man—"not mine. I don't think he's happy. I didn't mean to interrupt you. What about the first time we met?"

"Do you remember a visitor that evening?"

"No. Ah, yes. The Yankee fellow, who threw back Val's money, because Val supposed that he might have peeped into your letter."

"That's the man," said Gerard. "Do you know, I shrewdly suspect that Yankee to be one of the finest fellows alive?" And Gerard, with much enthusiasm and some humor, told the story of Hiram's clandestine benefactions. With the honest fervor natural to youth, Reginald declared that Hiram was a brick, and protested loudly that something should be done to reward gratitude.

"I don't think it's a common virtue," said Reginald; "and where you find it, I think the soil is likely to be generally good." And indeed there are few of the virtues which are less inclined to be solitary. The two agreed to take ad-

vantage of their passage through London to call upon Hiram. They had but a few hours to spare; but not being hindered by other business they drove Strandward, and alighted at the restaurant. When they entered, Hiram was deftly distributing a pile of plates before a tableful of hungry guests. He recognized Gerard at once, and bowed to him with the waiter's gesture of welcome, and having disposed of the hungry tableful, hurried to the new arrivals.

"Good-day, sir," he said to Gerard. "Good-day to you also, mister. I had the pleasure of seein' you, sir, I remember, when Mr. Lumby sent me on a message to Valentine Strange, Esquire. You was in the billiard-room in that gentleman's mansion. What shall I have the pleasure of bringin' you, gentlemen?" They had not eaten a meal since leaving Paris, ten hours before, and they were each ready for a beefsteak. Hiram bustled about, and brought up the steaks in prime order, tender and juicy, flanked by floury potatoes, crisp little loaves, and the foaming tankard.

"And now," said Gerard, "when you can spare a moment, I want to speak to you." In a little while Hiram found a lull in the demand for edibles and potables, and presented himself before the friends. "What sort of a berth have you here?"

"Wal, sir," returns Hiram, with the tone of a man who declines to commit himself, "it's the bridge that's kerryin' me over a strip of time's tide, and I haven't got anything to say agen it."

"Nor much for it, eh?" said Reginald.

"Yes, sir," returned Hiram; "lots for it. But it ain't the sort of theme to stimulate eloquence, and that's a fact. It's greasier than I like, for one thing."

"Would you care to change it?" asked Gerard.

"Wal, mister," responded the cautious Hiram, "that depends. I don't want to leap out o' the fryin'-pan into the streets."

"Would you like to take service?"

"And go about in a pea-green vest and have my head floured?" inquired Hiram, with decision. "No, sir; I should not." He looked a little offended at the suggestion.

"No; thank you," said Gerard; "I don't want a flunky.

If I offer you a post, I shall not ask you to have your head floured. But I want a smart faithful man, whom I can trust; a handy fellow who has no objection to travel, and who won't object to do what he's asked to do."

"Wal, sir," returned Hiram, "if your shootin' my way, it's a bull's-eye. I'm all that. But what should I be asked to do?"

"I want a man to attend me personally, to travel with me when I travel, and to act generally as a sort of combination of valet and confidential man. I shall offer you a liberal salary, and if you treat me well I shall treat you well."

"Very good," said Hiram. "I am engaged. But if you don't mind, I'll make a stipulation—two stipulations. Number one: If I don't like the berth when I've tried it, I am not to be regarded as ongrateful if I throw it up."

"Certainly not," interjected Gerard.

"And number two," continued Hiram. "That my own private proceedin's air not curtailed, so long as they don't interfere with my duties."

"What private proceedings?" inquired Gerard with some misgiving.

"Wal," said Hiram, slowly, looking from one to the other and stooping to fold a napkin on the table, "the Apostle Paul says matrimony's honorable. As soon as ever I can manage it—I've got a little gell to take care of, and I'm going to take that way with her. And if you give me a berth that lets me marry, I shall do it."

"Oh!" said Reginald, seeing Gerard a little dashed by this information. "And who's the lady?"

Hiram straightened himself and looked at the little man keenly, in so much that Reginald felt embarrassed, and took refuge behind his eyeglass. "Yes," said Hiram, as if in answer to an inward inquiry, "I'll answer that question. The lady is the daughter of a bitter enemy of your family's, Mr. Lumby. Her father is— Wal, mister, the long and short of it is, her father's about *the* biggest thief unhung. His name's Garling." At this the two friends glared at him and each other. "That is so, gentlemen," said Hiram, with great gravity. "I know something about it, and part of it I guess. Mr. Garling married under a false name, and deserted his wife and daughter, when my little gell was a baby." And in answer to Gerard's amazed in-

quiries, he told briefly all he knew of Garling, detailing with the rest the scene in the offices of the great firm. "I think it possible that I may owe you something," said Gerard, enigmatically, when Hiram's narration was closed. The date of Hiram's interview with Garling was that of the elder Lumby's last visit to town. Gerard more than half-guessed the truth. "I must leave you to arrange your own domestic affairs," he said, after a pause. "I shall not interfere with them. And now—as a matter of form—though I could scarcely forego it, I must ask to see your employer, and make some inquiries about you."

"That's only fair to me," said Hiram, dryly; and retiring, sent up the master of the restaurant. Gerard made his inquiries.

"Well, gentlemen," said the restaurateur, "I should be very unwilling to give him a recommendation."

"May I ask why?" demanded Gerard.

"Because," returned Hiram's employer, with a twinkle of his beady foreign eyes, "he is the best servant I ever had, and I should be sorry to lose him."

The two friends laughed at this; and the restaurateur, pleased at the success of his little jest, laughed also.

"He is honest?" said Gerard.

"As I have found him," said his employer, "as the day."

"Sober?"

"Remarkably. He is good fellow," declared the restaurateur, returning to his joke; "and I am sorry to say it, if it is to lose me my Hiram Search."

"You don't object to his bettering his position?" asked Gerard.

"No, sir," the foreigner answered heartily. "He is a good fellow. He will get on."

On the strength of this, Hiram was recalled; preliminaries were completed; and the waiter formally gave his employer a week's notice. It was agreed that he should present himself at Lumby Hall in complete readiness to enter upon his duties.

"You will have a good servant, sir," said the little foreigner.

"And I shall have a good master," said Hiram.

"I thought you had no masters," said Gerard, "you Americans?"

"If you call beef mutton, it don't alter the flavor much," responded Hiram; "and when I'm in a country, I reckon to try to speak the language."

"Oh," said Gerard, "and how many languages do you speak?"

"I sha'n't take the cheer for languages at nary one of your universities yet awhile," returned Hiram; "but I've spent five years in the Leevant, and I've picked up a bit o' five or six—French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, German, and a smatterin' of Turkish. I can talk any one of 'em fit to be smiled at; but I can't read one, wuss luck."

"Gerard," said Reginald when the two were outside, "it's my opinion that Mr. Search is a jewel."

"I think so too," said Gerard; "but we shall see."

The week sped by rapidly; and Hiram at the appointed hour appeared at Lumby Hall. In less than a week after the date of his appearance, the cook and the upper-housemaid, who were both comely young women, and had hitherto been close companions, quarreled over him. "Ladies," said Hiram, having observed this, and desiring to live at peace, "I feel myself kind of shaking down in this charmin' society of yourn. After a rovin' life, how sweet is do-mestic felicity! The view of the feminine character which you have afforded me sence I first entered the present abode of bliss, has sort of crystallized the notions of matrimony which up to that time were floatin' in my soul. I'll ask you to excuse the poetry; but that's the fact. And in consequence of the impression prodooced upon my mind by you two charmin' angels, I am goin' to get married."

"Indeed, Mr. Search," said the upper-housemaid. She was a courageous woman, and bore the blow steadily. The cook was *hors de combat*. "May we hask," said the upper-house-maid, "who is the 'appy bride?"

"The happy bride, as you air so flatterin' as to call her," returned Hiram, "will next week assoom a position in the household of Mr. Jolly."

This was true. Hiram had already interested Gerard in his sweetheart's fortunes, and little Mary was elected as Constance's maid.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AND HOW HE BEGAN TO KNOW HOW FUTILE HIS DISHONESTY WOULD HAVE BEEN EVEN HAD HE SUCCEEDED.

Over London a dull gray sky, obscuring the last sun that shines this month of May. Over Lumby Hall a leaden sky that weeps and weeps; and round about it, a maudlin wind that moans. In London City, beneath that dull gray sky, the great House of Lumby and Lumby once more flourishes, and lifts a head the prouder for defeated shame. In Lumby Hall there are hearts that beat in answer to the City triumph, and throb with sweeter and more human joys; for in Lumby Hall there is this great joy, that the master of the house, long stunned by terrible calamity, is beginning to know the forms and faces round him and to remember names.

You who are old, and have lived your lives, and bred your children to usefulness and honor, do you remember any happier times than those when your children began to know you, and to reach out chubby arms for you, and to make lingual stumbles over "father" or "mother"? None sweeter, I dare answer for you. Yet in this house was a still deeper and more sacred joy; for the head of it was coming out of a dreadful dream of childhood, that had been renewed too early; the brain that once had concocted great schemes, was again active; the weak heart that had led large enterprises, was once more beginning to pulsate aright. He was coming back slowly to conscious life, and would by and by hear glad tidings—as though some mariner who had suffered utter shipwreck should wake to find his good craft whole again, and the drowned comrade's hand holding his with the grasp of friendship.

Wailing wind and clouded sky around and over Lumby Hall, and such gay and tender hearts within it. Low-lying skies above the great refurbished house of Lumby and Lumby in the City. Strike fast, free wings, and bear us on. The British Channel gray and misty; the coast of France with a glint of sunlight on it; the fields of France bright with broad sunshine, and many a corn-field waving

in the wind. On southward and westward, till we pass the awful hills, and hover beneath a blazing sun and in the burning summer air of Spain. And southward now to Cadiz, where we drop, swooping downward with sure flight to strike our fancied quarry—Garling!

Garling on the shady side of a narrow street, walking with bent head and hands behind him as of old, looking an incarnate secret here, as in London City half a year ago—Garling self-banished, with all his wicked schemes foiled and broken, and his heart broken with his schemes—Garling among his ghosts again.

"Do you love me well enough to trust me?"

"I have no words to tell you how I love you."

Then a chamber with a dying woman in it, and a cheap clock hurrying on the time and stumbling in its haste to get the horror over. Then a dream-journey by cab and rail and sea. Then a real journey by cab renewing the dream-journey; a railway-station filled with hurrying crowds, faces showing here and there in the gaslight, and lost here and there in the gloom; a platform almost deserted; a green light turning a sudden eye upon it; a lamp swinging; a whistle sounding; a hand upon his arm, and a heart which seems for a second as though it ceased to beat. His own. If it would but cease to beat! If it would but cease!

Lost—all lost. The game played quite in vain. Familiar voices in the street laugh at the lost gamester—familiar faces smile derisively. He hears the voices—"When did ever villainy thrive? There is a fate in these things." He reads the meaning of the smile. "We were fools enough to believe this shallow fellow a financial genius." Is it bitter? Is wormwood bitter? He would rather live on wormwood than face that smile. And it mocks him always, awake and in his dreams, and there is no escape from it.

A night at sea, with a moon struggling to pierce a bank of clouds; the sea crying with waste voices. The game played out, and played in vain. A figure on the deck of a ship which floats a black hulk on the waste gray heaving waters—a figure with bent head and hands folded behind him, ghost-tormented. Garling, in this lonely narrow Cadiz street, walks with bent head and hands folded behind him, and knows that figure on the ship's deck and

knows the ghosts that haunt him. He knows the figure, flying with false passport for the swindler's refuge, Spain. "EDWIN MARTIAL, aged 49, height 5 ft. 6 in., complexion sallow;" and so on, and so on. He has that phantom's passport in his pocket. He sees the gray ghost landing at the quay; he sees him taking lodgings, walking the streets of Cadiz day by day, eating his phantom heart out as he goes. Then in fancy the ghost shoulders him, and as it were melts into him, and he and the ghost are one. He and the ghost walk on together to a café in a by-street, and go in together.

Years before, when the cashier first meditated on his crime, he had begun to qualify himself for a residence in Spain. There is but little pleasure to be got in any foreign country if you are a resident there, cut off from communion with your own countrymen, unless you know the language spoken by the people round about you. Garling was not a common villain, and had set to work, having once made up his mind to flee to Spain, to learn Spanish. It is not a difficult language; and though he spoke it like a stranger, he learned to read and write it as glibly and correctly as his mother-tongue. But though he was not a common villain, and though his majestic plot had been wrecked by chance, and not by any fault inherent in it, he had fallen into the one curious blunder of fancying that perpetual leisure would bring with it unrestricted pleasures. Well, he had got perpetual leisure, and it was gall. The bare fact that he was without employment crushed him. He had lived plainly, though to his very heart a gourmet, promising himself the pleasures of the table. He was not so poor even now, with the honest savings of his life-time, that he could not command those pleasures, and he had no joy in them. He had loved good wine, and though holding himself back from it, had lusted after it. It had lost its flavor and its sparkle. It did but upset his Spartan stomach and make his head ache. He had lived for the World and the Flesh, and he was here surrendered to the Devil; and the world was empty and ashen and gray; the joys of the world were years and years behind him.

And now he began to know how futile his dishonesty would have been even had he succeeded, and he groaned inwardly many a time, and acknowledged the truth of that base but salutary proverb which says that honesty is the

best policy. He began to feel the proverb base as well as true, for a plain reason. It is but a poor reason to be honest—that it pays. Honesty has a better plea than that. It is honest, whether it be a good policy or not. And so this able scoundrel—this swindler of genius—was crushed before the last blow fell upon him. And here now the last blow was to fall.

Spain is not an advanced country, and has done her best or her worst to sweep the tide of human progress back from her shores. Spain is the stanch old uncompromising Tory among nations. Yet even Spain could not shut out that glorified and beatified Paul Pry we name "the press." She could fetter Paul. But for once in a way he brought the truth home, and struck it deep to the heart of a remorseful, but not yet repentant, villain; for Garling took up from the marble-topped sloppy little table in his café a Spanish journal, and therein read this narrative. Paul had garbled the story a little, as you will see, but he was right in the main.

"A singular romance has just transacted itself in London. The last chapter of this romance reserves itself for Madrid, and is therefore of special interest for our readers. The great company of Lombaro Brothers, who probably take their name from Lombaro Street, the great banking quarter of England, was lately compelled to suspend payment. For more than twenty years the affairs of the Company were conducted by One Garling. The name and the persistent character of the criminal alike point to Scandinavia as his birth-place. One Garling was a gentleman of the loftiest repute, and was chancellor of the City Exchequer. He was completely trusted by the Company, and was believed to conduct their affairs with unequaled skill and probity; but in reality he was a criminal of daring genius. During the whole of the time for which he was intrusted with the conduct of affairs, he was engaged in the elaboration of a scheme for the ruin of his employers, a plot to which he appears to have been stimulated by a hatred of the City institutions. The result of defalcations spread over a long series of years, amounting to twenty-five millions of reals, was deposited at Madrid, and One Garling himself escaped to this country. It now transpires, however, from the statement of the English journals, that he was detected before his flight and compelled to sign a con-

fession of his misdeeds, by Sir Lombaro, the head of the City Company. Sir Lombaro also succeeded in extorting from One Garling a complete restitution of the stolen moneys. But now begins the romance of the story. Sir Lombaro, who is presumably old and frail, was so affected by the emotion of the time, that he lost his reason, and having mislaid the drafts, he allowed the City Company to become ruined."

Garling dropped the paper on the little marble-topped table, and stared before him with a ghastly face. He saw already that he had a second time missed his prize. He took up the paper and read on.

"The establishment was therefore declared bankrupt, and its properties were seized by the law officers. The books containing the accounts of the association were sold for waste-paper; and in one of them the confession of One Garling, and the drafts made by him upon the Spanish Bank at Madrid, were miraculously discovered. Application was immediately made to the Madrid authorities, and it was discovered that in spite of all his cunning, Mr. One Garling had allowed the money to rest in their hands. It was therefore withdrawn by the authority of the miraculously recovered drafts, and the City Company is thus re-established. It is seldom—" And the Spanish Paul glided from history to morality, and preached the natural sermon.

Garling read on steadfastly to the end. With that marvelous fatuity which attends and produces crime not yet crushed out of him, his spirit writhed in incredible bitterness under this final misfortune. Since his flight he had never until now taken up a newspaper. He had supposed that as a matter of course the merchant had communicated with the Madrid Bankers long before he himself had set a foot in Spain, and now he found that the money had been still lying at his call until within a few days ago. He had told himself a thousand times since his exile from England, that money was valueless to him. He had discovered beyond any chance of denial that the time for such enjoyments as he had promised himself had gone by—that his appetites were effete, that the life he had led in London had so molded him that his leisure was an agony, and his heaping up of money the foolishest of all possible blunders. And yet he writhed in spirit at what he read. He was

Fate's fool, it seemed, he who had thought himself so cunning. Cunning? The man's belief in himself crumbled. Where were the fertility of resource, the unshaken constancy to self which he had boasted all these years?

He felt a singular curiosity to know how long a time had elapsed between the loss and the recovery of the drafts. He sat for an hour, thrumming on the table, with bent head, seeing nothing that went on about him, and scarcely thinking. Nobody to look at him would have supposed that any very dreadful trouble weighed upon him. Trained so long to impassivity, his face kept a fair copy of its usual expression, and he passed for an idle gentleman whiling away the time in mere reverie. But the curiosity he felt drew him to the Spanish Paul. He paid for his coffee, inquired his way to the office of the journal in which he had read the news, and in due time reached it. Senor Parria, a courteous-mannered gentleman, received him. Garling explained his mission. He was Mr. Edwin Martial, an Englishman, having business in Cadiz, and for the present residing there. He had had transactions with the great House, and had known Mr. Garling. Perhaps his curiosity as to the authenticity of the story might be pardoned. Assuredly, replied the swarthy senor. The facts as related had appeared in a journal published in the Spanish capital. Since then, the English mail, by some cause delayed a day, had brought the English journals to Cadiz. The swarthy Senor regretted that he himself did not read English, but—would the inquirer care to search the papers, and if need be, go back on the foreign file and discover any reference to the story? Mr. Edwin Martial was obliged. He declined the cigarette proffered by the courteous editor; he sat down with his hat on the floor beside him, and looked through the file of a London daily preserved for the past three months. There he made out the whole of the story. He saw himself denounced in a slashing leader as the Prince of Modern Swindlers. The lash of the virtuous leader-writer's indignation fell harmless upon him. The eulogy of his artifice brought him no comfort. He saw, of course, through all the guesses the virtuous leader-writer made, and passed on calmly to search for the next article. For two or three days he made a figure in the world's news, and then he dropped out of it for five or six weeks. Then he came back again with a burst, and for another

day or two he made the most interesting item in journalistic intelligence. The leader-writer was at him again, and rejoicingly denounced him as the Prince of Modern Dullards. He brought his leader to its proper length by an affecting eulogium upon the virtue of honesty, and the paying properties of that attribute; and he pictured with considerable pathos, the restoration of British Mercantile Honor to its old place in the confidence of the trading communities of the world.

Garling read everything he could find, and the courteous editor cast an eye upon him now and again, and never made the remotest guess as to his identity. It was natural enough that any British mercantile person should be interested in the details of this remarkable business story. The courteous editor himself was interested in it, and questioned his guest as to the result of his readings when he arose to go. With colossal imperturbability the guest replied; with splendid quietude of demeanor, bowed himself out stiffly and like an Englishman, and so went home.

When fiends left the bodies of their human victims at the bidding of the exorcists, they tore their habitations. Were the fiends Avarice and Greed preparing to leave Garling that they tore him so? To an old criminal, repentance must needs be an awful thing. Had it begun to come to that with him? The sunlight ruled broad dazzling lines upon the wall, and he sat in shadow and looked at them as they slowly, slowly moved. Gray and stern and cold he sat there, and again his ghosts were with him. What a life! To have these grim and terrible monitors for his sole companions. Well, there was business and its old attractions left him. He had money enough to start the world with, and he would heap a bigger fortune together by honest work than his foolish fraud had cost him. A blunder! a huge blunder! Wipe the record out, and begin again. Start life anew. Why not, with five thousand pounds to begin with? There is a Bourse in Cadiz, and the city is one of the homes of European commerce. So he set his ghosts behind him and beat his remorses down, and rose for the moment a conqueror. No gesture proclaimed his victory; but his cheek flushed a little, and his sunken eyes gleamed, and his fingers trembled.

He began that very day to prepare for his new enterprise, and as he did so he felt his spirit reviving, and the old reso-

lution filled his heart again. "No man shall say the reverses I have suffered broke me down," he said; "I will make a new name, which shall outshine the old one." He began with caution, and thrust his whole soul into the enterprise, so that howsoever the ghosts might batter at the gates and moan outside, they should find no entrance. He had not been at work a week before he found that he was known and recognized in spite of his *alias*. Not a soul would trust his bond a moment, and his operations were restricted to the limits of his capital. He did not quail at this or at anything, but went on doggedly; and with keen eye and resolute heart pursued his purpose. For a while it prospered, and it became the fashion among speculators to watch him, and where they could discover his financial movements, to follow him. It did not pay him to be followed, and to have the mob with him, and so he worked underground as it were, and grew more secret than ever. But it was impossible even for Garling to work without tools, and he found a tool in a certain Koulo, by descent a Levantine polyglot, with no man knows how many nationalities mingling in his veins. There was some Greek blood in him, as his name seemed to indicate, and some Hebrew strain also, as his nose and lips sufficiently testified. It is not probable that there was in his day a meaner dog in Cadiz. He had been trained for the law, but was universally distrusted, and so had no practice of any sort, and was forced to live by his disreputable wits. Garling worked through this man without seeming to have any association with him, and thus leaving the mob behind, began to thrive mightily. Garling read character, and trusted Senor Koulo with not one farthing for an instant.

The Senor knew little of his employer's affairs; but he learned enough to know, on one occasion, that Garling must necessarily have a considerable amount of money by him, waiting for deposit on the morrow. He was a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, not unhandsome in his own coarse way, but marred by signs of dissipation. He was a dull dog, and he knew it; but, though he was no match for Garling intellectually, he knew himself a match and more than a match for him physically. And so it befell that the fraudulent cashier experienced in turn the miseries he had inflicted upon another. The Senor, swaggering in under cover of the darkness, on pretense of having some business

news to communicate, sat down and began a rambling, disconnected tale. He had been drinking to screw his courage to the sticking-point, and had so far overdone it that his employer discerned the signs of drink upon him, and sternly bade him go. This command, with many *c'rambos* and *c'rajos*, the swaggering Senor resented, and Garling, renewing his injunction, turned his back upon him, and in that moment received a blow which stretched him senseless upon the floor. Then, suddenly pallid and shaky, the wicked Polyglot searched his employer's body, found his keys, shakily opened his cash-box, with trembling hands abstracted its contents, opened his safe, and renewed the thievish procedure there, and then, with trembling legs, betook himself down-stairs. He disappeared from Cadiz, and was believed to have transferred himself to London. He was said to have been seen in gorgeous raiment in the neighborhood of Leicester Square, where, of course, he was a patriot and a man of family, shamefully exiled on account of the purity of his political principles.

It took Garling weeks to recover from the physical effects of the wicked Polyglot's violence. Even when he got about again, he felt the old indomitable spirit gone. His nerves never recovered from the shock they had suffered, and at times his mind was clouded. No man pitied his misfortune, and though that seemed to make little difference to him, he felt it. He gradually sunk back from the life upon which he had set himself, banked what was left of his money, and lived narrowly upon its interest. Being thus thrown upon himself, he found the ghosts that haunted him more numerous and more terrible. The darkness gathered about him, thicker and thicker; and there were awful faces and voices in it. He began to see truly how base his life had been, and spiritual terrors opened on him. Into the gloomy valley in which his days were spent, how shall we dare to follow him? A great man thrown away! The capacities for a great career wasted, and worse than wasted! He used to murmur sometimes a mournful excerpt from what, in his reading days, had been his favorite play: "There is no creature loves me; and when I die, no soul will pity me!"

Leave him. Come away from where he sits, with the shadows of a hard and wicked life gathering deeply round him. Leave him—with pity—if you may. We shall see

him but once again before the last Shadow which waits for all shall fold him—

> That Shadow, waiting with the keys,
> To shroud him from his proper scorn.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"YOU DIDN'T ANSWER THE TWO LETTERS I SENT YOU AT THE GRAND HOTEL."

A PICNIC party had assembled on Welbeck Head on a splendid morning in the early days of June. The picnic party leaving itself free to ramble over the sterner picturesqueness of the headland, naturally chose Welbeck Hollow to take luncheon in. Perhaps the Hollow looked its best to an artist's eye in autumn, when the foliage of its trees had grown mellow with the tints of the dying year, but on this particular June morning it was very lovely; and he or she who demanded a fitter place for open-air delight, would have been hard to please indeed. For the whole broad expanse of blue above the headland absolutely seemed to laugh; the air was warm, the herbage dry, and the foliage in the first flush of its summer beauty. The tears of the imprisoned princess sparkled in the sunlight, and the little stream they made bubbled away through its channel of lichen-covered rock with a voice of perpetual music.

At this gathering, Gerard played host, and his mother hostess; and there were two or three score of people there, mostly young, and nearly all bent on enjoying themselves, as their time of life and the splendid weather befitted. Rising against the belt of trees, in contrast to their green, were two or three tents of striped pink and white. The girls were gayly dressed, and moved about merrily here and there, making pretty, shifting pictures, on which any eye but that of a cynic born might rest well pleased. I have said before—and I feel safe in repeating it—that the average of beauty in these favored islands is high. Most of the young ladies were pretty, and some one or two downright beautiful. But from amongst them all, had Paris been there to play judge again, Constance would have carried off the apple. Now, men are so constituted,

that a beautiful woman in their eyes always looks as though she were something more than beautiful. Rosy cheek, coral lip, star-like eyes, all these things, charming and admirable of themselves, reveal to the gaze of the male creature inward and spiritual beauties which the fair proprietress of cheek, lip, and eye may be miles away from. "Sure, nothing ill can dwell in such a temple?" My love-stricken Amandus, I know not. I am myself all too susceptible to the charms which have entrapped you. I am not stern enough to act as censor in such a matter; but the sweet eyes may not mean constancy, nor the sweet lips good temper. Go your ways, Amandus; wed the lady if she will, and be as happy as you may. The chances are she is worthy twenty of you; but beware of taking her for an angel because she looks like one. Beware? Whoever did beware in such a case? Run away, Amandus, and be happy. Chloe awaits you; and though I were wiser than I am, why should you care to listen? Perhaps in a year's time you may be able to write your own sermons.

It was not any more than lover-like folly in Gerard to set a name and a virtue together. Constance and constancy ran always together in his mind. Always the recipient receives according to his own measure. The tunes which were familiar to you in childhood move you far more than more beautiful airs since listened to, because you put your own memories and your own emotions into them. The worshiper creates his own deity. Venus, and other forms of beauty for old Greece; fetich, bits of rag or stick for modern Ashantee or Ujiji. And it is so with love. Your wisest love is your noblest man. And if you meet this by telling me that Arthur marries Guinevere, that John Milton is three times unlucky, that Sampson falls into the hands of Delilah, you have said nothing unanswerable. The blameless king worshiped purity though he knelt at a false shrine. I have no doubt that one of the Mrs. Miltons stood for Eve, and gave us an immortal picture, to which she was no more like than I to Hercules. The big-limbed practical jester of old days had so frank and honest a foolish heart that he believed in Delilah when she had twice betrayed him. The true lover sees his own possible ideal best actually existent in the woman he loves, and before that he bows down and worships. You can always deceive loyalty, because it is so simple-minded where

it loves. It is harder to deceive mean-eyed suspicion, that peers everywhere. And the loyal-hearted Gerard had no doubts. That other men admired Constance, was very likely; men must needs admire transcendent beauty when they see it, and there was no jealousy in him, any more than in Othello before Iago transformed him.

As host, Gerard had duties in which he was proud to be associated with Constance if she chose the association; but when she rambled away, the duties held him, and he had no complaint against her. He no more suspected Constance than he suspected himself, because she was his very ideal possible best, and at his poorest he was loyal and honest. It clouded his sunshine a little when he missed her; he had otherwise been no lover. But he would see her again by and by, and meantime she was probably enjoying herself, and would be back again shortly. She did not come back so shortly as he had hoped; and after awhile, he appointed a lieutenant, and set out to hunt for her, and naturally went the wrong way.

Constance, with head dropping just a little, had walked away from the white and pink striped tents, and winding up through umbrageous foliage along a path of gray rock, with green and golden lichen glinting on it here and there, had come out upon a sort of platform, which commanded a view of the whole arena of pleasure. Her cheek was somewhat paler and less full than it should have been, and her eyes were rather soft than lustrous. For a moment she paused, and through the branches which concealed her, looked down upon the Hollow, and then turned and went upward toward the hoary summit of the great headland. Life chirruped and hummed and rustled in the air and in the wood on either side. Gray rabbits frolicked across the path; the squirrel sat up impudently in the undergrowth almost at her very feet, and cracked a nut from his winter hoard, the insect tribes wheeled round and round in dizzy circles, as if drunk with sunlight; and the wanton bird sung until the leafy covert echoed to their music. The very ground she trod on was embroidered gold and green in shifting patterns, as the branches waved and the changing sunbeams flickered. Lost in her thoughts, she wandered on until the bare shoulder of the headland heaved up from the frondage and the sea lay in view. There, in the shelter of a great bowlder, washed smooth by prehistoric

waters, and rolled there by some unknown agency, she sat down, and trailing her parasol point along the surface of the granite, made fanciful patterns of no meaning. At times, a faint, faint sound traveled up to where she sat from the picnic party, half a mile away. Voices called to each other in the woods. The sea, far below, made a solemn murmur. A footstep startled her. She looked up, and there stood Val Strange before her, not fifty yards distant.

There was no path up here on the bare top of the headland; but Val stood in a sort of gully, with vast irregular stones piled upon each other on each side of him; and this natural passage if pursued would have led him to the spot upon which Constance sat. But seeing her in time, and believing himself to be unobserved by her, he turned, shot beind a great bowlder, and by devious ways climbed to the top of the right-hand ridge, concealing himself from her gaze all the way. He had no doubt that Gerard was with her, and was anxious to escape unseen. So he crawled stealthily from shelter to shelter, and in brief time came on a line with her, and from behind a rock peeped down. Then he saw that she was quite alone, and repented him that he had hidden; he could at least have lifted his hat to her and have seen her face. A thrice-rejected lover had so much right in the world, if fortune should favor him. For a minute or two he watched; but she was turned away from him, and he could see nothing of her face. He made a flank movement, and secured a sight of her whole figure, and then he saw that she was not only alone, but that she was weeping. She had seen that he saw her, and she had marked him as he made away. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ.* Val was ignorant; but her loneliness encouraged him, her distress touched him, his passion drew him to her, and in short he scrambled down the rocks and made the best of his way toward her.

She heard him coming; by some electric message of the heart, she knew that it was his footstep, and not that of any straying picnicker; and with feminine guile, she dried her tears, threw into the slope of her shoulders a sort of pensive air of landscape observation, and feigned to be unconscious of the intrusion. As he came nearer, her apparent ignorance of his presence chilled and repelled him, and he felt that it would have been far easier to have ap-

proached straightforwardly, since chance apparently so willed it, and have gone his way. He was half-inclined to return, and stood still for a second or two. The pause warned her. She had cried when he had seemed to avoid her; yet almost in a minute she had told herself it was best he should go by; and yet, and yet, and yet again, when she heard his approaching footstep, her heart rejoiced, and now she could not bear that he should go. With a fine pretense of negligence and accident, she turned, and seeing him standing there, she arose, as if with a little start of surprise, and holding forth her hand, advanced a step or two to meet him. Val raised his hat, and stepping forward, took the proffered hand.

"I had not thought you were at the picnic, Mr. Strange."

"No," said Val. "I had an invitation to be there; but I did not expect to be in England at this time, and—" He did not finish what he had to say, if, indeed, he had decided to say anything; but looking at her face, he saw that she seemed happy, in spite of his suspicion that she had been weeping a minute or two back. Her eyes sparkled, her cheek was flushed, and she was all grace and beauty. Val would have been an egotist, indeed, if he had set down all this to his own return. Lovers do not torture themselves in real life so much as they do in novels, where, as you know, a poor author must fill up his three volumes somehow; but it is beyond doubt that they are a stupid, and a self-torturing race. "I was an ass to think she was crying," said Val to himself. "She is happy enough. I suppose she loves the fellow, after all."

"Indeed," said Constance, lightly and brightly enough. "And where did you think of going?"

"My yacht is lying in Quadross Bay," said Val, "and I thought of sailing somewhere, last Wednesday."

"A vague sort of destination, isn't it?" said Constance, smiling. "Somewhere?"

"Yes," said Val, moodily, "vague enough." He had not expected to meet her and talk in this off-hand way with her. "She means to be friendly, I suppose," he thought, "and has the sense to let by-gones be by-gones."

"Shall we talk nothing but commonplace?" thought Constance. "Has my silence set up an unbreakable barrier?" Silence was too terrible, and she must say something.

"The Hollow is a lovely place for a picnic," she said. (Anything does for small-talk.)

Val supposed the Hollow was well enough. "I don't seem to care much for scenery lately," said poor Val, vacuously.

"No?" said Constance.

"No," said Val. Then ensued a conversational breakdown, and the silence became extremely awkward. The two hearts could not whisper to each other through the barrier. Constance made a pretense of surveying the seascape. Val, being a man, had less tact, and was still less an actor, of course. In love's arena, woman stands on her native heath. The male creature is only a wanderer there, and feels himself lost. But though she kept more outward and inward self-possession at the moment than he did, she felt the continued quiet weigh so heavily, that she was obliged to break it, and in her anxiety to say something, proposed the last thing she desired. "Shall we join the others, Mr. Strange, since you are here, after all?"

"No," said Val; "I don't care about it, thank you." Then he made a desperate plunge. "It's very kind of you to meet me in this way. It's the wisest way, no doubt. But I'm not quite equal to it—yet. You didn't answer the two letters I sent you at the Grand Hotel, and I've seen ever since that it was a presumptuous and unmanly thing to write them. But it's not my fault that you're the loveliest woman in the world, and—"

"Letters?" cried Constance. She never meant to deny the truth; but she had only received one, and she was eager to exculpate herself from the graver charge of cruelty and neglect he brought against her when he spoke of two.

"Didn't you get them?" cried Val, half wild with a sudden rush of new hope. He gave her no time for answer. "Don't you know why I went away from England? Don't you know that I was ignorant of all that happened during my absence, until I came back and found those papers?" The mere mention of the papers brought Gerard to his mind, and checked him. But he broke past the thought, and went on the more impetuously. "And when I found that you were free again, I only waited to give Gerard a fair chance, and followed you at once. I wrote to you twice, and had no answer; and I took your silence

as the strongest negative. It seemed cruel—I can't say I didn't think it cruel. By what terrible mischance they missed you, I can't guess. But—would you have left me in such bitter suspense had you received them? Would you have been so disdainful and so cold?"

It seemed now, as he spoke, so hard a thing to have left unanswered the one she had received, that she did not dare confess that she had read it.

"I am sorry if I seemed discourteous," she said in answer; "I am sorry if you have suffered."

"If I suffered?" cried Val. "When I thought you disdained my presumption too much to answer by a word! When I have thought so for a month past!"

"I am sorry," she faltered again.

"Constance!" said Val, "Heaven knows I did not seek this meeting!" that was true enough, in a sense; but he had hoped for it, and the nebulous fancy that it might come had led him to the headland. "But since Fate has thrown me in your way, I will not resist her bidding. If you don't care for me, and I go on persecuting you in this way, I am the most horrible cad alive? But I can't help taking the risk. Tell me that you don't care for me at all; tell me that you are happy, and I will go away, and never trouble you again!" How could she tell him to go, when her heart yearned so over him? Yet she made a little struggle still.

"I am very sorry to give you pain," she murmured.

"Tell me the plain truth," said Val masterfully. "If you are happy, send me away. If you care for me, I will never give you up. I will hold you against the world. Tell me the plain truth, and let me go."

"Mr. Strange," she answered falteringly, "our paths are ordered for us, and they are wide apart."

"Not unless you order that it shall be so," he said doggedly. "You shall give me a plain answer."

She had no answer ready. During the whole of their colloquy she had scarcely dared look at him, and since the talk had become earnest, their eyes had not met once. But now her gaze rose slowly to his face, and though her eyes met his for but a second and were dropped again, the longing in them smote him through and through, and he seized her unresisting hands. "You love me!" he panted —"you love me!"

What answer could she give him? It was true. Her bosom began to heave, and her cheeks grew pale, and one or two great tears rolled down them.

"Shall we part?" he asked her, fiercely. "Will you wreck two lives? No!" And he cast his arms about her in a mad defiance and strained her to his breast. She was conquered, and she knew it, and he knew it. Yet even then, in the first wild joy of certainty, the world's probable verdict arose before him. Well, he defied it. It was surely better to spoil one life than three—especially when the life to be spoiled was not his, but another's.

But even whilst they stood there, a voice reached their ears, crying "Constance!" Val released her, and they stood with pale faces looking at each other. The voice was Gerard's, and was not more than a couple of hundred yards away. It was not loud, but modulated a little, as if the lover did not choose altogether to cry out her name, and felt a certain shyness in the act; but in the dead stillness of the summer air they heard it clearly. Then they heard the searcher try another tack. He began to sing, and they knew that *La donna e mobile* was meant to guide the wanderer toward him.

"Go!" said Constance. "Do not let him find us here."

"You love me?" questioned Val, half fiercely still.

"Yes," she answered. "Go."

"Come with me," he whispered; and, treading like a thief, he led her round the great bowlder under which they had been standing all this time, and by a zigzag way upward, keeping shelter; and then by a zigzag way downward, until she saw the Hollow below, through the waving branches of the trees. The voice grew more and more distant as it sung along the little rocky pass.

"Leave me now," whispered Constance. "Let me go."

"You love me? Tell me that you love me."

"Yes. Let me go."

"You will write to me. We shall meet soon?"

"Yes." And she was gone, pausing awhile in the wood to compose herself. A moment or two later she walked serene into the swarded Hollow, and came round the bowlder which held down the imprisoned princess of the local fairy-tale.

"Where have you been, my dear?" asked motherly Mrs. Lumby. "Gerard has gone away to look for you. Mr.

Lumby has been asking for you." And the girl followed Gerard's mother to one of the striped tents where in an arm-chair sat the head of the great House in the City, and smiled and nodded at her in a fashion somewhat childish. It seemed scarcely like that he would ever recover his old self; but he had mended wonderfully since the beginning of the brighter weather, and knew the faces of his friends. The old man was very fond of Constance, and was never happier than when she and Gerard were near him. He had contrived to make out in a dim way that the great House was not ruined after all, but his comprehension of affairs was like that of a child, and as yet pathetically incomplete. Milly sat smilingly on one side of him, and had been with him all morning, prattling to him of the things he could understand. As she greeted the wrecked old man, a great pang passed through Constance's heart, and she kissed him with tears in her eyes. Motherly Mrs. Lumby took this for pity for Gerard's father, born of the girl's love for Gerard, and she kissed Constance warmly; and the old man smiled his heart-breaking childish smile and said: "I am glad you are fond of each other." All this made the position terrible for Constance.

Val, having parted from her, turned his back upon the Hollow, and having wandered a little way, came to a heathery spot, in which he cast himself down and tried to think. His fierce joy had already faded, and he began to face the situation with a sense of fear. Popular opinion was something to him, and he knew that it would be against him. This, of course, gave him no actual pause, but it cooled his triumph. And then there was Gerard and his stricken father. Val knew how fond the old man had grown of Constance; and he was not a brute, and felt something of the pain he would inflict upon those who had already so keenly suffered. Then Reginald's tongue had lashed Val's foibles once or twice, and he respected the stanch little man's opinion of him, and dreaded his disdain. And one thing was certain. If Val knew anything of human character—and he prided himself, as most men do, on knowing a good deal—he would have a bitter enemy in the man he was robbing. Against Gerard's grief, or possible grief, of course Val's own egotism shielded him. It was better that Gerard should be wounded than that he himself should. *Cela va sans dire.* Let us not be bitter. We

have all thought so in our day, over this matter or that; and if we have never stolen another man's lover from him, why, that may not have been our particular temptation. And perhaps some of us have done, or attempted, even that. Most of us live in glass houses, though we build them in different patterns.

Mechanically, as he lay there in his heathery nook, Val drew out a cigar, struck a fusee, and began to smoke. Gerard's wanderings brought him that way in the course of some five minutes, and the scent of the fusee still lingering heavily on the air, he beat round for the smoker. As he came, he chanted in a deep and jovial bass:

> "Shepherds, tell me, tell me,
> Have you seen—have you seen my Celia pass this way?
> Cheeks lily-white, lips rosy-red"—

and the rest of it. There was no touch of fear or suspicion in his mind; and the bright air, the quivering sunflecks, the birds' glad chorale, the dancing leaves, were each and all ministers of pleasure to him. So he threw back his shoulders and opened his chest, and rolled out the air of the glee in a mellow roar like that of an amiable tuneful lion, and came bursting through the boughs on the little clear space where Val lay. The smoker made no effort to escape him this time, and knowing, by the sudden cessation of Gerard's voice, that he was seen, he said, without turning round: "That you, Lumby?"

"Why, Val, old chum!" cried Gerard, joyously, "I thought you were on the bounding deep, aboard the 'Mew's-wing.' What brings you here, you ancient mariner—playing at Diogenes?"

"The master of the confounded craft has got the pip, or something of the sort," growled Val.

Gerard came and sat beside him, and demanded a cigar. Val supplied him, and lay silent. Here was the first difficulty. If the action he had begun should be carried out—and he had no dream of relinquishing it—Gerard should know. Honor bade, that at least, at least he should tell his rival of his intent, and let him know that his happiness was threatened. But looking at his rival's happy face, he felt too much a coward so to wound him. "It's like stabbing a sleeping man," he thought, with an awful inward spasm of reluctance, "to steal her from him without warn-

ing him. I must give him a chance of an appeal. My only possible atonement to him is to tell him openly that he has lost her, and will have to surrender her. If I do that, I can face him. If I don't do it, I am a dastard." But in spite of the fact that he could speak thus strongly to himself, he could not bring his tongue to speak one word to Gerard.

"Are you come to join our picnic, ancient mariner?" asked Gerard.

"No," said Val. "I came out by mere chance for a stroll, and wandered further than I meant. I have business to see to; and, by the way"—drawing out his watch and looking at it—"I shall be late already."

"I must go, too," said Gerard, bethinking him again of Constance. "Ta-ta, if you won't come. See you again soon, eh? You'll dance at the wedding on the first of July, won't you?"

Val hid his face and searched his pockets.

"I shall count on you, you know. Good-bye."

"All right," cried Val. He could have shot himself for his own baseness. "Good-bye."

Gerard was gone, and began his chant again between the whiffs of his cigar: "Shepherds, tell me, tell me." The voice died away in the woods; and Val cast himself upon the heather once more. "Miserable coward!" he cried.

The Primrose Way was scarcely pleasant traveling even now.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HIS FEET WERE IN THE PRIMROSE WAY, AND HE HAD NOT THE HEART TO LEAVE IT.

I HAVE omitted to tell of an encounter between Val and Gerard, in which Val received as many and as hearty thanks for the service he had rendered as the most exigent of men could have expected. Gerard took the restoration of the money of his friend almost as if it had been a gift. He associated the recovery of love, fortune, and happiness with Val Strange, and longed for an opportunity to show his good-will to his chance benefactor. On his side, the long-standing friendship between them rose to white-heat, and stayed there, for Gerard's enthusiasms were neither

easily excited nor quick to cool. In the expressions of his regard and affection, he did not seem altogether gracious—feeling it hard to speak out where he felt so keenly. He blundered through with interjectory ejaculations of "Old fellow," and "Old man," the rough clumsy amity touching Val to the quick all the while, knowing what he had meditated against his friend's peace.

"I owe you more than the money, old man," the grateful recipient of new fortune had told him. "*You* know." That was all he could say on that matter; but the blush on his honest face and the ashamed tenderness of his eyes, were eloquent even to his rival. Val of course pooh-poohed the notion of gratitude.

"My dear Gerard," he had answered, "you owe me nothing." (He knew well enough what Gerard owed him.) "You don't want to insult me by supposing that I might have bargained with you for the papers."

That was so ridiculous, that even in the tremor of his gratitude Gerard had burst into a great shout of laughter at it, and had struck a jovial hand in Val's and gripped him hard.

As he lay in the heather after Gerard's departure, the remembrance of this scene forced itself upon him. "He has got the money, hang him!" said Val moodily. "If I hadn't been so ridiculously Quixotic and punctilious about it, I might have saved myself this humiliation; I might have saved Constance from the talk of every old tabby in the county, and everything would have been open and above-board." He began to think somewhat bitterly and angrily of Gerard, and to feel that his hitherto successful rival stood somewhat unduly in his way. It is the most natural thing in the world to hate a man if you intend to injure him. In such a case, hatred is a sort of spiritual corn. If you allow your boots to pinch your toes, nature protects them—and grows corns. If you propose to pinch your soul, by damaging a man who never harmed you, your moral nature protects itself by hatred. And in each case the protection is a source of considerable discomfort. "He has got the money," said Val again; "confound him! That ought to be enough for him. It was a piece of amazing luck to get it, and he may be satisfied with what he has. And what right"—and here Val began to think himself on stronger ground—"what right has he to wreck a woman's

life?" He began, on the strength of that reflection, to feel himself virtuous. And he had at least the assurance from Constance's own lips that she loved him. To marry another man in such circumstances would be—he scarcely cared to characterize it with Constance in his mind. And so, by steps almost imperceptible, the unhappy Val went downward toward hatred and dissimulation, and justified himself as he went.

Mr. Lumby was not long at the picnic, being still a little weak in body as in mind. It was one of the pleasant characteristics of Lumby Hall that nearly all the servants were old family belongings. The parlor-maid, for instance, was the daughter of a coachman and a cook who had made a match of it, and retired from servitude at the Hall after growing up there from stable-boy and kitchen-maid. The present coachman had been stable-boy; the butler had been pantry-boy; the footman had been a page in the old house. All the servants were held by ties of old association to the place, and one or two of them had felt the triumph of the rehabilitation of the family as though it had been a matter personal to themselves. One of these attached old servitors gave Mr. Lumby his arm as they walked down the gentle slope of sward which led from the Welbeck Hollow to the lower meadows. There the carriage waited, and with Milly by his side, Mr. Lumby drove away. The young people kept the thing going until a late hour. On the tombstone of the poor princess, a great bonfire was lighted as the shades of evening fell; the trees round the beautiful little circle were stuck full of Chinese lanterns; the band played and the guests danced and made love, and otherwise enjoyed themselves. There were seniors enough present for the preservation of the proprieties, and not enough to damp the hearty hilarity of the time. Gerard, when everything was over, surrendered Constance to Reginald's care, and drove his mother home. To his surprise, the old man was sitting up to receive them, and in answer to remonstrances, declared that he felt well and strong. He had insisted on re-hearing from Milly the whole story of the recovery of the lost papers, and had grasped it more clearly than before, and now he was quite full of the approaching wedding.

"Gerard, my lad," with feeble cheerfulness, "you must have a bachelor party before you are married. I had a

bachelor party. You must ask Valentine Strange. We owe everything to Valentine Strange, and I always liked him. I was always very friendly with his father and his uncle in their day. We must have Valentine Strange."

Gerard and his mother were both so happy in the old man's recovery that festivity seemed natural to them. And why should not Gerard give a party to his bachelor friends before he finally left their circle and became a Benedick? It befell that Val received an invitation to that festival within eight-and-forty hours of his interview with Constance, and that it came by the post which bore to him the first letter he had ever received from her. The wedding was already fixed for the first of July, and Gerard's farewell to bachelorhood was naturally fixed for the preceding evening, the thirtieth of June. And here was the month already.

On the morning that these two missives arrived, Val had received an unusually large batch of letters. His hopes of hearing from Constance had risen by this time to exasperation, and he ran feverishly through the bundle in search of a lady's handwriting. In his haste, he passed two epistles as one, and Gerard's invitation was among the first letters he opened. He glared over it, and felt stricken. Old Lumby had written a postcript to it with his own shaky hand. "Your father and your uncle," he said, "were dear friends of mine. You must come to my son's party." He had signed this brief and shaky message, "Your grateful servant." The Stranges were not without their debt to the Lumbys, Val remembered; and whatever happened did but seem to make the enterprise he was bent on look darker. He was none the less bent upon it; but he rebelled, naturally enough, against the gathering host of circumstances which made him feel criminal. His was a mission of knight-errantry. He was going to save Constance from a life-long slavery and misery; and for a knight-errant to have his conscience throwing mud at him as though he were a thief, was decidedly unpleasant. The almost piteous gratitude of the broken old man hurt him, and appealed pathetically against his purpose.

"I shall have to tread on the old man to get at her," he thought, and he began to dislike the old man for lying there to be trodden on. Why would people get in a knight-errant's way? A knight-errant prancing along among

primroses to rescue his appointed imprisoned damsel had a right to better treatment, surely. She didn't love the fellow. She loved *him*, Val Strange. And yet, here were people blocking his road to her, and insisting on being injured by pure justice.

But at last Val discovered Constance's letter. He did not know her handwriting, but he knew the crest on the envelope, and he tore the missive open with trembling fingers, and read this:

"DEAR MR. STRANGE,—We have both been foolish. I appeal to your honor. Allow me to forget. Yours truly,

"CONSTANCE JOLLY."

Now, this of course was absolutely maddening, and in the circumstances, the recipient felt himself justified in the employment of a good deal of strong language. Val was a gentleman, and by all rules of courtesy, a gentleman is forbidden to swear over a lady's letter. But Val gave way, and raged, and then sat down crushed for a moment, but recovering himself, began to cast about in thought for a means of untying this knot. He felt the delicacy of Constance's position; he began, even in a minute or two, to see how well this coyness became her, and to feel that he would be very much worse than unheroic if, because of such a check as this, he drew back from his enterprise. So he caught up a pen, drew a sheet of paper to him, and began to write. Words came easily, and he filled three or four pages with protestations.

"No," he said suddenly; "expenditure of words in a case like this is waste of power." So he wrote simply: "We love each other, and I will not surrender you." He initialed that Cæsar-like dispatch, and having inclosed it in an envelope, was about to address it, when it suddenly occurred to him that his handwriting would be known, and that some inquiry might be created by it. He tried to feign a lady's hand; but even to his own eye the fraud was too transparent to deceive anybody. He set his wits to work to find a way through this difficulty, and after a minute or two of thought he saw it. He looked at his watch, consulted a time-table, rang the bell, and ordered the dog-cart for the railway-station. Driving thither, he took train for Bristol, desperate with impatience on the

journey. Arrived, he took a hansom, and drove to an hotel he knew, a quiet and retired house, with an old-fashioned clientèle. His uncle had been wont to stop there, and Val was known. He ordered luncheon, and made a feint of eating, and descended for a chat with the landlady. "By the way," he said, casually, "did my maiden aunt ever stay here?" The talk had been going on for some time, and this query was dropped with considerable artfulness.

"I didn't know you had a maiden aunt, Mr. Strange," said the landlady.

"Didn't know I had a maiden aunt?" said Val. "Nonsense!"

"Upon my word, I didn't," returned the landlady, laughing. "Why didn't she get married?"

"That's not my business, Mrs. Oakley," said Val, lightly. "But"—drawing the envelope from his pocket—"I have a little joke for her here. I don't want her to know from whom it comes. Will you address it for me?"

"Valentine's-day has gone by, Mr. Valentine," said the landlady. "I hope you're not going to plague her."

"Not at all," said Val. "I think I'm going to please her. Do address it. She won't know your handwriting, and of course she would know mine."

The landlady took the envelope, and sitting down, dipped her pen in the ink. "Tell me the address," she said. Val gave Constance's address, and the landlady wrote it flowingly.

"Thank you," said Val. "And now give me a postage-stamp, if you please." He stamped the letter, and dropped it into the post-box in the hotel lobby. "That will pass unsuspected," he said to himself; and after a little further talk, designed to cover his retreat, he drove back to the station, and turned up at Brierham in time for dinner. A day or two went by, how heavy and monotonously you may guess; and Constance, struggling with herself, refused to be drawn into a correspondence fraught with so much danger. Outside the magnetic influences of Val's presence, she could control herself, and could call pride and honor to her aid. During this time, Gerard experienced curious treatment at her hands. She was languid and cold at one moment, and warm and eager the next; and he, being without the key to the puzzle, was perplexed by the extraor-

dinary variations of her manner. Constance tried hard to compel herself to some tenderness toward Gerard which should seem to herself to commit her to him irrevocably, and this struggle naturally bred a reaction of languid coldness. This also in its turn reacted, and in her self-reproach she was once or twice amazingly sweet and tender to him, and looked at him with such eyes, that he could read nothing but love in them. His own willingness to read that sweet message helped the deceit; and his constant patience under her coldness, his simple manly loyalty, and the downright sincerity of his worship, were not without their effect upon her.

No answer coming to his Cæsar-like dispatch, Val began to grow nervous about it, and to fear that he had overdone authority. And all this time the fatal day was drawing nearer, and Reginald's knowledge forbade Val the house, or he would have gone thither and made an opportunity for seeing her. This being out of the question, he wrote a long letter of appeal and protest, and putting the old ruse in action through a new medium this time, again had it forwarded under a female hand. Constance shed many bitter tears above the lines he had penned; but she kept a resolute silence. Some anger began to rise in her heart at his persistency, even whilst she valued it as a proof of the love she prized so dearly, and felt to be so disloyal. But everything was binding her closer and closer to her own spoken bond with Gerard. Her parents' affection, the general understanding that the marriage was settled, the very imminence of the ceremony itself, the suffering Gerard and his people had already undergone, the congratulations of her friends on her lover's recovery of his old station, and the renewal of the match—she felt powerless to struggle against all the accumulated influences. And so, Val began to anger her because he had power to pain her. He, meanwhile, unconscious of the influences which molded her conduct, or weighing them imperfectly, sat in the shadow of his own egotism, by this time grown monstrous, and in its gloom saw nothing but itself. Constance's marriage with Gerard could be nothing, to his mind, but a hideous and shameful sacrifice, and at all hazards he was ready to stop it. But how? The days went on, and he was powerless, and to add to his miseries, Gerard came over a week before the date appointed for the wedding, and see-

ing how Val had lost his old cheerfulness and jollity, insisted upon his going over to Lumby Hall, and staying there with the guests who had already begun to arrive in view of the impending ceremony.

"So be it," said Val at length, overborne by Gerard's reiterated friendly pressure. He was kindly and gentle by nature, but he was half murderous in his feelings toward this blundering, genial, happy rival, who thus insisted on flouting his happiness in his face. Gerard had driven over, and nothing would satisfy him but that Val should at once drive back with him, and take up his abode at Lumby Hall until the wedding. The other accepted this programme in desperation, and gave orders that the necessary things should be packed at once. Perhaps even this move, mad as it appeared, might lead to something. The two young fellows drove from Brierham to Lumby Hall together—the one all joy and friendship, the other all despair and hatred, which he dared not show. To Val's surprise, Hiram Search received him. He had the keenest memory for faces, and knew him at once. The circumstances in which he and the Yankee adventurer had met and parted were not altogether soothing to his self-respect, and though under ordinary conditions he would have forgotten and forgiven, he was so tender now that even so slight a matter as this made him sore.

"You have met Mr. Strange once before, eh, Search?" said Gerard, who was in high good spirits.

"I remember the fellow," said Val, haughtily, neither knowing nor caring that he renewed the disagreeable impression he had at first sight created. Why should he care, whatever Hiram or anybody like him might think or feel? It was his ordinary habit to be courteous to all men, and his misfortune that he met Hiram in this unusual and abnormal mood.

"Look after Mr. Strange," said Gerard; "there's a good fellow." Hiram did not care to *valet* Mr. Strange, and this was the first disagreeable he had encountered since coming to Lumby Hall. But he obeyed nevertheless; and having seen Val's belongings taken upstairs, began to unpack his portmanteau, when out fell a large envelope with exceedingly frayed edges. Across this envelope were written in characters of unusual clearness, these words: "Thy grace being gained, cures all disgrace in me."

Hiram saw them, and thought nothing of them; but catching up the envelope, a portrait slipped out of it. He had seen Constance more than once, and the portrait was too true to be mistaken. What brought Mr. Strange with a portrait of Gerard Lumby's sweetheart? And what was the meaning of the inscription on the envelope: "Thy grace being gained, cures all disgrace in me"? Hiram was unfavorably impressed with Mr. Strange, and was ready to believe evil of him. This little event of the photograph affected him, therefore, somewhat unduly.

And now, as the least imaginative of men may fancy, Val's position began to be unbearable. Any further approach to Constance was impossible; and though she had confessed that she loved him, the confession seemed only to have set her apart from him the more determinedly. At Lumby Hal lhe had almost as much freedom as he would have found at home, and in the after-dinner dusk he used to absent himself from the jovial party in the smoking-room, and prowl round Daffin Head, and stare at the lights in the house, feeling like the Peri who at the gate of Paradise stood disconsolate, One afternoon, when the marriage had grown so perilously near that his head swam and his heart failed to think of it, he wandered on the customary way, hoping, in spite of despair, that some avenue yet might open, when a trim little figure came tripping along the country-road, and he recognized a late fellow-passenger, the girl he had befriended at Southampton. She knew him, and made him an odd little obeisance, half nod, half courtesy; and he seeing that she came away from the Grange, seized eagerly at the poor straw of hope her presence afforded.

"Good-afternoon," he said awkwardly. "I think I remember you." She repeated the composite obeisance, and smiled and blushed with pleasure. "You don't live in this part of the country, surely?"

"I am Miss Jolly's maid at the Grange, now," said little Mary innocently. Val's heart gave a great leap, and his eyes flashed; but he controlled himself.

"Oh," said Val; "and how did you come to be there?"

Mary blushingly informed him that Mr. Search had recommended her to Mr. Lumby.

"Will you do me a little favor?" asked Val, with as lit-

tle agitation outwardly as though the favor had been the smallest in the world.

"If I can, sir," said little Mary. She was ready to fly to serve him.

"I want you to meet me at the gate of the Grange in an hour and a half. That will be ten o'clock. Will you give a note to Miss Jolly for me, if I bring it then?"

"Oh yes, sir, with pleasure," said Mary.

"I don't want anybody else to see it," said Val. "Nobody else must know of it. Now can I trust you to be discreet?" Mary promised the utmost discretion; and Val sped back to the Hall, and wrote his last appeal, begging Constance to meet him, if but for a moment, to appoint her own time and place, and give him but a word.

Round the foot of Welbeck Head, across the little bay beyond and up at the Grange, was a very pretty bit of rustic walk, and Mr. Search, who was not without an eye to nature, strolled there in the cool, with his hat a good deal on one side, and a cigar between his teeth. Val passed him swiftly, and was a little savage to see him there, without being conscious of any very precise reason for anger. Hiram, unreasonably angry, and unreasonably suspicious, continued walking, to see what took him in the direction of the Grange. The Yankee was, as times go, an honorable man, and he did not care to dog anybody; but he excused himself—he was walking that way already before Val passed him. "There's no call on me to turn," he said, "unless I've got a mind to." Before the gate of the Grange, the dark figure ahead of him seemed to pause for a second, but for a second only. "If he comes back this way," said the guilty Hiram, "he'll think I've been spying on him:" and deviating from the road, he strolled in the faint misty moonlight across the fields, accusing himself somewhat in his thoughts for having suspected his employer's friend.

But Val in that momentary pause at the gate had thrust the note into Mary's hands, with just two or three hasty whispered words: "Let no one see it. I will wait for an answer." The maid carried the note to her mistress, who was in her own room. Constance read it, and could not resist the temptation its summons brought her. She muffled herself hastily in a gray shawl, stole tremulously downstairs, and found the dining-room deserted, with its windows

open on the lawn. She stepped out into the night, passed round the house silently like a ghost, and sped with a heart that sounded an impetuous alarm, along the darkened path. Val, who had marked that he was followed, had seen Hiram off the field, and was by this time back at the gate again, standing in the shadow of the trees within the drive.

"Constance!" he whispered. She stopped short, and he approached her and folded her in his arms. "My love, my love!" he murmured. "My heart was breaking to see you. Why were you so cruel? Why did you leave me unanswered?" And when she would have answered him, he stopped her lips with kisses. "You love me," he murmured again. "Why should you break two hearts, and blight two lives? I know you love me. I will not let you go." This masterful and peremptory wooing is not the way with all women; but if the right man adopt it, it rarely fails. And Constance in his arms found the urgent voices of duty and honor suddenly gone dumb, and her tired heart at rest. "Here," she thought, "is my place after all."

"It is too late to go back," said Val. "You love me, and you can never be happy without me. And I will not live or try to live without you." She began to cry and to cling to him, and to protest—she had been so unhappy—so unhappy. How was a poor girl to know where duty lay? It was terrible to think of marrying Gerard. She told Val as much, and he kissed her anew with passionate triumph. Should she write to him, and say so, even now in these last days of hope? she asked. But her father wished the match, and her brother and her aunt were favorable to it. She would have to endure so much shame in breaking it off at this late hour. What *could* be done?

Even yet it was not too late to pay some little tribute to honor. Even yet, Val might have played the man, and have told Gerard the plain truth, and faced his indignation and his misery. But his feet were in the "Primrose Way," and he had not the heart to leave it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"ALL IS READY," SAID VAL, QUIETLY, "TELL YOUR MISTRESS."

It was the last night in June, and a score of jovial young gentlemen were making merry at Lumby Hall.

There were two elders with them—Mr. Lumby and Mr. Jolly, and but one of the invited guests were absent. The ladies staying at the Hall to attend the morrow's ceremony were a little aggrieved by the bachelor party, and the drawing-room was dull. The general feminine opinion was unfavorable to Mr. Lumby's projection; but the old gentleman himself was in a high-feather amongst the young fellows gathered about his son, and knew nothing of the muffled petticoat rebellion. He was growing stronger every day, and had already, without much mental difficulty, gone through terms of settlement with the lawyer, making over half his share in the City House to Gerard. He sat there and sipped a glass of wine, and chatted gayly, if somewhat childishly, for a time, and then withdrew, leaving the bride's father to keep the younger blood in order, if it should need a restraining hand. The elder Jolly was glorious, and had assumed so juvenile an air, that beside the bald-headed Reginald he looked young, and the two might almost have changed relationships.

"Where on earth *is* Val Strange?" cried Gerard. "Don't any of you men know?"

"There's been something odd about Val lately," said one of the guests; "I began to think yesterday that he had a tile loose."

Reginald thought that possibly he might be able to throw a little light on the reason of Val's absence. If you love a woman yourself, it is not altogether easy, at the last moment of losing her, to congratulate the man who carries her away from you; and the difficulty seemed likely to be increased when the congratulations were expected to extend over the time occupied by a dinner and an evening meeting like the present. So that, knowing what he did, it would have been easy to explain Val's late eccentric conduct—if it had not been impossible to offer such an explanation.

At this sort of gathering there are generally one or two people who are eager to make speeches. The elder Jolly was absolutely overflowing with Disraelian eloquence, but he had to save himself for the effort of the morrow. He had written his speech, and had committed it to memory; and it was his belief that this oratorical effort, when it came to be produced, would sparkle like fire-works. The audience would include a good many of the county magnates, and he felt that they would be almost worthy to listen to

his carefully prepared impromptus. A bashfully eager gentleman in a corner was being urged by his companions to rise; and had at length, in spite of himself, given so decided a negative, that the attempt to persuade him had been almost abandoned, when Mr. Jolly, discerning that beyond a doubt the tide of speech-making, if it once set in, would drift his way, burned so eagerly for a chance, that he beat a tumbler upon the table, and cried: "Gentlemen, Mr. Whetham is longing to address us." The Cicero of the corner coterie being thus publicly signaled out for attention, arose, smiled vacuously, played in a dégagé fashion with his watch-chain, and with a curious springy motion in the legs, unburdened his soul in manner following: "Gentlemen all. And Mr. Jolly. Had extreme happiness—knowing—friend—Lumby—years. No hesitation—saying—admirable fellow — calculated — perform—duties—citizen—most satisfactory manner. Call upon you—therefore—drink his health—musical honors. Really sorry—can't express—feelings—overwhelming at the moment—more flowing language. Gentlemen, Mr. Gerard Lumby." Then he sat down, and wondered where his speech had gone to, and whilst he wondered, the toast was hailed with enthusiasm, and the young gentlemen assembled sung, *For he's a jolly good Fellow*, with such heartiness, that the startled domestics rose in the servants' hall, and the ladies in the drawing-room looked at each other in amazement. Lady Farham, relict of Sir Samuel, late of Mincing Lane, and mother-in-law to George Lumby, murmured to her married daughter that it was really like a tavern, and fell into a stony contemplation of the wall-paper, from which she was aroused with difficulty. She said afterward, in view of the events of the night, that she had quite expected a judgment.

Gerard returned thanks with hearty brevity, and then somebody proposed the health of the bride. He was a very young gentleman, with a habit of saying in the duller portions of his oration—"In short, gentlemen, as the poet says"—and at these moments the guests looked toward him with a look as of awakening interest. But as he always forgot what the poet said and tailed off into prose, they settled back again in a manner disconcerting to the speaker's feelings. Finally, when the young gentleman had made half a dozen abortive efforts to recall the poet's

utterances, he sat down; and the guests cheered for the bride, and drank her health with much ardor; and Mr. Jolly arose. It was one of those supreme moments of temptation which occur not more than once in a life-time, and he yielded. He spoke the speech he had prepared for the wedding-breakfast; and having delivered himself, sat down and contemplated the draft which would be made upon him in twelve hours' time, and he a mental bankrupt. After such an effort as he had already made, he knew that great things would be expected of him. He had fired his *fue de joie* a day too soon, and the consciousness that he had no powder left was indescribably depressing. He felt that the reputation he had already created would be fatal to him. But suddenly a ray of light illumined his mind, and he became tranquil and even happy. He resolved that he would be too much affected to say anything!

"When the cat's away the mice will play," said Hiram Search to himself as he stepped forth from the gates of Lumby Hall into the softly clouded summer night. "They'll prob'ly be rather lively over at the Grange this evening, an' I'll just walk over an' have a look at Mary." He lit a pipe, and walked comfortably, thinking of the morrow's wedding, and the improvement it brought in his own chances. He would not be single much longer, though he was less in a hurry to marry than he had been. Not because his affections had in the least degree cooled, but because Mary was now provided for, and the old reason for desiring at once to assume a position in which he could protect her had been removed. As members of one household, they would be together, and Hiram looked forward to a period of courtship which bade fair to be extremely pleasant. He had got over half his walk, when the moon shone out suddenly with so charming a luster that he paused to observe it. As the cloud which had hitherto obscured the fullness of her splendor slowly sailed away, moved by some wind too high for him to feel its faintest breath, the broad silver light seemed bit by bit to drive back the shadow over the fields toward the sea. The moonbeams with that wall of retreating darkness beyond them made the distance dimmer than it had been, and almost shut the water from sight. But suddenly they touched and silvered the foam of the little breakers on the sand of the bay, and passed

along as if floating out to sea, and in the midst of the belt of light he discerned the snowy sail of a vessel as it rounded Daffin Head. "I guess that's Mr. Strange's yacht," said Hiram to himself. The little craft had been creeping a good deal about the coast for the past week or two; and Hiram, like the rest of the inhabitants of those parts, had become familiar with her aspect.

In the mind of a fanciful man, thousands of odd little premonitions which never come to anything rise and float about and go again, to be forgotten. But if ever by chance one of these idle fancies is fulfilled, it becomes memorable, and erects itself into a precedent. Perhaps to Hiram's mind there was an unrecognized sense of something furtive suddenly revealed in the little craft stealing round the headland in the midst of night, and being thus made visible. He had taken a dislike to Val Strange, and he had been exercised by the discovery of the photograph. There had been a latent feeling of resentment in his mind that evening at Val's absence from his friend's dinner-party, and Hiram had been inclined to think that Mr. Strange was "hankering"—that was his phrase—"after the boss's little gell." Being thus predisposed to think ill of Mr. Strange, and having some ground for suspicion already, he absolutely surmised that the "Mew's-wing" might be hauging about to carry off Constance. He smiled at the thought, and pooh-poohed it, and put it away, as being altogether too preposterous to be believed in. And yet it had a sort of hold upon him, and made him feel unhappy and discontented with himself.

"If there *should* be anythin' in it," he said at last, "what a dog I should feel if I'd neglected this curious kind o' warnin'. Does *seem* kind of like a warnin', somehow. Such things hev been, I know. Why, Hiram, s'pose you make a fool of yourself, and look into this matter. 'Twon't be the first time you've gone a fool's arrand, and nobody need know what an ass you are. You ain't afraid o' me laughing at you, air you, Hiram?" He walked on swiftly; and bodily motion adding, as it does, to mental excitement, he grew out of the cheerfully cynical mood in which he had started, and came to something like genuine fear and earnestness. When he saw the lights of the Grange, he chose the turfy side of the lane rather than the resounding road, and ran crouching along as if he were

hunting something. Near the gates he paused, and a voice struck upon his ear. His heart began to beat, and he clinched his teeth and his hands and listened. The excitement he was in was more than nine tenths self-created, and he knew it, and rather scorned himself for it. Strain his ears as he would, he could hear no more than the murmur of the voice, and could not make out a spoken word, until, to his complete surprise, he heard his own name singularly coupled. Two words came clearly—"Marry Hiram"—and then the voice went humming on again inaudibly. "Marry Hiram?" thought the listener. "Am I dreamin'? What on airth is this?" He crept nearer, and heard the voice more clearly.

"You must know," it said in low and urgent tones, "that unless she has a female companion, she will be laid open to such scandalous suspicions that there will be no removing them. You will have no responsibility. It is not in your power to prevent her from going. I will land you at Swansea to-morrow; and directly after the wedding, you can return; and with five hundred pounds in hand, you can marry at once. Think, you foolish girl, how few the chances you are likely to have of making so much money."

Hiram needed no sight of the speaker to know that it was Val Strange. He seemed in a very whirlpool of amazement, and could scarcely believe that his premonition was coming true, clearly as he heard the words and plainly as they carried their own meaning.

"Oh," said another voice, and though Hiram was prepared to hear it, he started at it, so that he almost betrayed his presence, "Hiram would never forgive me—never! He is fond of Mr. Lumby, and he spoke of him many a time before he went into his service. And, oh, Mr. Strange, you have been very kind to me"—"What was this?" asked the listener, with a new madness in his veins)—"but is it fair to run away with her the day before the wedding?"

"Will you come?" asked Val, impatiently. "Yes, or no. Five hundred pounds—think what it means—wealthy friends for life, who will never forget the service you have done them—think what it means. Will you come?"

"Oh, Mr. Strange," cried Mary, "I dare not. It all seems wicked, and Hiram would never forgive me."

"You are not so grateful as you pretended to be," said

Val, under his breath, but with anger in his tones. "You might never have seen Hiram again but for me. What would you have done if I had not befriended you at Southampton?"

The listener in the midst of his amazement breathed more freely. He had heard *that* story. So Val Strange was the unknown benefactor upon whom he had so often called down blessings in his heart. It softened somewhat the rage he felt against him.

"If it were not for Hiram," cried the girl.

"Hush!" said Val. "Do not speak so loud. Come, decide. Your mistress will not move without you; and if you will not come, you have wrecked her life forever. Ask what you will. If you are trying to make the terms for such a trifling service higher, ask what you will. Think what this foolish delay may mean. Will you come?"

"No," said the girl, but in the voice in which the listener could read a tone of yielding. He crept nearer until he laid a hand upon the gray stone of the gate-way pillar. The gates were open, and the pair stood just within them. Val pressed the yielding girl harder.

"Suppose somebody tried to make you marry a man you did not love, and Hiram wanted to save you and to take you away, would that be wicked? And if you had a friend who was too hard-hearted to come with you and save you from scandal, would you forgive her?"

"I will go," said little Mary.

"No," said Hiram, stepping into the moonlight; "I reckon you won't."

They stood astounded before him. Mary shrieked, and ran toward the house; but Val was rooted to the spot he stood on. For one awful moment he expected Gerard's form to appear behind Hiram's, and almost listened for the approaches of the friend he had endeavored to betray. But he was no coward after all, and his nerves sprung up like steel as he faced the intruder.

"What brings you here?" he asked.

"I can't speak lightly of sacred things, Mr. Valentine Strange," said Hiram; "and I won't say what hand guided me here to stop your villainy. But I'm here in time. Drop it. I sha'n't break my master's faithful heart by telling him the plot I lighted on. But I score off *you*, I do now, re'ly."

"Do you?" said Val, with desperate softness, toying with something that hung at his watch-chain, and glittered in the moonlight. "Are you sure?"

"I am sure of this much anyway," said Hiram, drawling on the words—"I sha'n't clear out o' this 'fore you do, an' it'll bother you to take my boss's gell away while *I* stand by." Val raised the glittering something to his lips and blew a soft, clear whistle. Quick as lightning, Hiram leaped at him, and though too late to check the call, he gripped his wrists like iron, and began to haul him down the carriage-way, resolved on holding him and alarming the household. They could not all be in the plot, and some of the men-servants would surely be ready to do a little for the honor of the house they served.

"Come here and help me," said Val, in a soft and quiet voice. "Hold this fellow, and do not let him go till we are safe on board." Before the words had left his lips, Hiram released his hands and struck him down. Turning, he saw three seamen in the gate-way, and grasped the whole situation in a flash. It would take the yacht an hour to round the headland, and he felt sure that he could reach Lumby Hall in a quarter of an hour. That would give time to alarm Gerard, to saddle horses, and to gallop here and intercept the flight, or even to pull out and board the yacht. He stood a second, and then burst past them at a leap, and recovering from a stumble in the road which had almost wrecked his purpose, he sped down the lane like an arrow.

Val was on his feet again. "Follow him!" he cried. "Double across the fields, and stop him at any cost. He is making for Lumby Hall," he panted, running beside his men, already in pursuit. "This way, and you will cut him off before he reaches Welbeck Bay."

But as they broke through the hedge, they saw that Hiram, nearly a hundred yards ahead, had shot through a gap, and was taking advantage of the short-cut home. He ran like a hare, and at every stride increased the distance between himself and his pursuers. Val called them off, and they came back breathing heavily, from the brief burst they had made.

"You have the luggage?" he asked. One of them answered "Yes." "Run down with it to the boat at once. Two of you can carry it. You, Thomson, stay behind

with me, and take care of the maid." It was evident that he had taken the crew of the yacht into his confidence, and probable that he had even feared some failure in his plans. The two men set briskly off; and Val, leaving the third at a little distance from the gate-way, walked down the drive, stopping a moment to adjust his disordered dress. The back of the house was in complete darkness as he passed it, but there was a sound of laughter in the servants' quarters. He went by lightly, and entered at the open windows of the dining-room. There he found Mary. She was crying bitterly, but with little noise.

"All is ready," said Val, quietly. "Tell your mistress."

"I dare not go," sobbed the girl.

"Your master will be here in half an hour," he answered; "and *he* will know that you were in the plot. You must go—you dare not stay!" The girl wrung her hands and stood irresolute. "Go!" he said, sternly; and she obeyed him. A minute later, Constance glided into the room with her maid behind her. Her hand, as she laid it on Val's arm, trembled as a steel spring vibrates when shaken; but without a word on either side they stepped on to the lawn, and Mary followed, traveling the Primrose Way like her betters, and like them, finding it unpleasant, and less smooth than downright honor's roughest footpath. They glided noiselessly round the house, and noiselessly along the graveled carriage-drive. There, at the gate, the seaman came from the shadows and gave an arm to the weeping maid. Once in the lane, Constance walked with a firm step; but the high-strung tremor of her hand warned Val against addressing her. Ten minutes' walking brought them to the shore, and they could see the boat that awaited them. Constance knew nothing of the alarm; but Val in his mind's eye saw the long figure flying over the fields in the moonlight, and in his strained and exalted fancy could almost hear the beat of his hurried footsteps. He watched Hiram in fancy breasting the rise that led to Lumby Hall, and he saw the old friend he had so wronged, sitting happy and exulting in the thought of to-morrow's happiness and knowing nothing of the blow the panting messenger came in haste to deal. Val had won his stake, and nothing could come between him and Constance now; but he was so far from happy, that he could well-nigh have surrendered his triumph. Yet for her sake, if not his own, there could be

no surrender, and he must be tender to her and true to her. For many a day to come, he would have to fill the place of all the world to her, and he vowed that he would do it. If the heart-service and perpetual worship of the man she loved could make her happy, her life should go without a cloud. But even as these vows rose in his heart, he seemed to see and hear the hurried flight that carried the awful news.

"Give me your hand, my love," he said gently, and helped Constance into the boat, and leading her to a seat, wrapped a cloak about her tenderly. The maid followed with her attendant seaman. "Give way, men!" he said gravely and quietly. The bow of the boat lay upon the beach; but two of the men pushed her off and leaped in as she floated. Val took the tiller ropes, and steered to where in the distance the yacht's white sails gleamed. His thoughts were still with the flying messenger, and followed him until the fatal message was delivered. "He knows by this time," he thought. It was not easy for Val Strange to be a sinner against friendship and honor. An almost unbearable pang ran through his heart as he pictured Gerard listening to the news.

Hiram's listening ear told him that pursuit had ceased; but he only laid himself out the harder, and ran until his chest seemed filled with fire, and every breath he drew was a sob. As he ran, he planned. So light a wind was blowing, that the yacht could make but little headway, and a well-manned boat might even take her up. At Lumby Hall they were as near to her as they were at the Grange, unless she had gone more rapidly than he counted. Hiram's hat had gone already in the leap through the gap, and now finding that the coat he wore pulled him down, he slipped from it; but in all his anxiety and haste, he marked the place where he dropped it, and resolved to return for it on the morrow. The incongruity of such a care at such a moment struck him with ridiculous force, and he had to fight down a half-hysterical desire to laugh. A two miles' run is a heavy business for a man who is out of training, and Hiram, before he had reached the gates, had run himself almost to a standstill, and his most urgent efforts took him scarcely faster than his average walk. But he toiled on, and coming near the house, made a final spurt, and dashed

in at the door-way headlong. The venerable butler was the first to meet him, and seeing him running along the corridor in a half-stagger, stopped him.

"Mr. Search!" cried the butler, in amazement, "what is it? Thieves!"

"No," gasped Hiram. "Mr. Gerard—fetch Mr. Gerard. Call him out here. Quick, quick, quick!"

The butler, with one glance of astonishment, ran to the room in which the party sat assembled. Mr. Jolly had just arrived at that happy conclusion already recorded, when the old servant entered and with a flustered air whispered to his young master: "There's something wrong, sir. Will you come out, please?"

Gerard arose and followed him, and came on Hiram, leaning against the wall, sobbing for breath. The butler paused there, and the young man stopped also, with a look of wonder at Hiram's wild face and figure.

"Call up all your pluck," said Hiram; "you'll want it. Valentine Strange has bolted with—"

"What?" roared Gerard, and taking Hiram by the shoulders, he shook him like a reed.

"Miss Jolly," gasped Hiram, and fell back against the wall, panting and glaring.

The young man's wild cry brought an inquiring face to the open door of the room he had just quitted.

"You lying villain!" said Gerard hoarsely, glaring back at Hiram.

"Gone aboard the yacht," said Hiram, struggling so to speak that it was terrible to look at him. "Don't waste a minute. Go to the boats. You may catch them yet."

The corridor was filled. "What is it?" asked one, laying a hand on Gerard's shoulder. "Nothing wrong?"

Gerard shook him off and burst into awful laughter. "This dog," he said, turning an ashen face on Hiram, "has a reputation as a humorist. He has been drinking, and has brought a jest home with him."

"Don't waste a minute," gasped Hiram again, struggling upright and seizing Gerard by the arm.

"If I thought your tale was true, you drunken rascal," answered Gerard, "do you think I would take a step to bring her back again?"

"To bring her back again?" repeated Reginald, pushing his way through the crowd. "Lumby, what is this?"

Gerard pointed him to Hiram, and as he did so, there was a look upon his face which made the messenger's heart ache.

"Valentine Strange has bolted with Miss Jolly. They're aboard the yacht." He tried to whisper, but his broken breath made each word a sob, and every man standing in the corridor heard the news.

"There's a pretty story isn't it?" said Gerard, turning on Reginald. His face, beyond all words, was terrible to see. "Is it true?" he said, laying his heavy hands on the little man's shoulders, and rocking him slightly to and fro —"is it true?" The two men looked at each other. Such a look! There was not a sound heard but that of Hiram's labored breathing. "He believes it," said Gerard. "The man is her brother, and he believes it." He threw his hands aloft and burst into laughter so wild and loud, that the frightened women-folk came streaming down-stairs, and the servants came up and peered into the corridor. "Do you believe it?" he cried, turning upon Mr. Jolly.

"No, sir," cried he. "It's an infamous fabrication, an abominable fabrication." He was white to the very lips; but it was evident that he did not believe it. "Reginald," he cried blusteringly, "deny this infamous scandal." As he turned upon his son with this appeal, Gerard turned upon him too.

"Denying it will not help us, sir," said Reginald. "Let us get our carriage and go home."

"What?" cried the father. "You believe it?"

"We may be of use at home," said Reginald doggedly. Even Mr. Jolly read despair in his face and voice.

"Gentlemen," said Gerard, in a loud voice, "let us go back to our wine."

His mother struggled through the crowd, and the men made room for her. "Gerard!" she said, touching him. He fell suddenly on his knees before her, and catching at her hands, he burst into such weeping as no man there had ever heard before.

CHAPTER XL.

"GERARD," HIS MOTHER HAD SAID, LOOKING WITH AN AWFUL FOREBODING FEAR AT HIS FACE, "YOU WILL BEAR IT FOR YOUR FATHER'S SAKE. THERE ARE THINGS WORTH LIVING FOR YET."

AND so in the race of love Val Strange won, and Gerard Lumby lost. After the one great outburst of grief, Gerard took things quietly, so very quietly, that those who knew him thought it dangerous. The wedding-party at Lumby Hall broke, as may be easily imagined, into most admired disorder, and took its devious way homeward in much astonishment, indignation, and sympathy.

From the time of her first coming to the county, Constance had been unable to secure the favorable verdict of the feminine population. It would be, perhaps, too cheap a satire to say that she outshone them all, and to find in that the sole reason for her unpopularity. She was not prouder than other women; but somehow she looked proud, and her beautiful face and figure wore a seeming of haughtiness which was quite an accident of aspect, and had nothing to do with her nature. The ladies then went away with a very dreadful impression of her. The graver scandals her elopement might have caused were set at rest by the arrival of a message from her husband. Val had started with a special license in his pocket, and they had been married the day after their flight; not at Swansea, but at a little village on the coast where he had a friend who was a clergyman. Five hundred pounds seems an absurdly large sum to have offered as a bribe to Constance's maid; but the fact was that Constance had flatly refused to move without her, and Mary's obstinacy had driven Val almost to his wits' end. And he was so eager that, to secure his purpose, ten times the sum would have seemed nothing to him. He gave little Mary the check after the wedding; but she did not know what to do with it, and was so miserable and frightened when she thought of facing Hiram, that Constance kept her, and they sailed away together, first to Ireland, and afterward to the Mediterranean. Val, in a

letter to Mr. Jolly, proposed to make settlements so liberal upon his wife, that the old gentleman, when the first shock was over, began to regard the matter even complacently, The girl had got married any way, though it had scarcely been done becomingly. And she had married the wealthiest man in the county after all; and what was done being done, Mr. Jolly felt it better to say no more about it, but to take the good provided, to ignore the discomforts attendant upon it, and be thankful. But being a man who in all things consulted the dignities and decencies of life, he feigned at first to be stricken quite through and through with grief, and sold the lately purchased Grange. It was given out that he was quite heart-broken; but he made a reasonable profit on the transaction, and was back in Paris in a fortnight from the date of his daughter's flight, strolling gayly along the asphalt, and enjoying himself hugely as a widower at large.

Mrs. Lumby had at first dreaded the shock this new disaster would probably bring to her husband's weakened mind. But he, reading Gerard's quietude wrongly, was less perturbed than she had feared, and indeed accepted the evil with an equanimity of resignation which would have been impossible to him in the days of mental and physical health. Even Gerard's heart was a little comforted in a little while by the failure of the blow to wound his father. For himself, he bore the blow with amazing fortitude; but those who knew most of him liked his quiet least. To his father and mother and to Milly, and even to the servants, he was gentle and quiet, but there was a resolved sternness in his manner, beneath its gentleness, which was new and alarming. But there was only one who had real warrant for knowing what the quiet of his demeanor covered. This was Hiram.

The terrible night of Hiram's disclosure Gerard passed alone.

"Gerard," his mother had said, looking with an awful foreboding fear at his face, "you will bear it for your father's sake. There are things worth living for yet."

"Yes," he answered; "there are things worth living for." But the foreboding haunted his mother's heart all night, and she lay praying and trembling, and scarcely dared to own her fear even to herself. There are terrors to which even in the recesses of our own hearts we dare

scarce give form, and this was one of them. In the morning, when Hiram's story, which had never seemed to need any confirmation, was confirmed, Gerard rang his bell, and summoned last night's messenger to his dressing-room.

"What set you upon the scent?" he asked. "Or did you find it out by accident?" His face was gray and hard, like stone, and Hiram had scarcely the heart to answer him.

"The first thing was," he responded, after a pause, "a portrait I saw in his portmanteau the day he came here."

"A portrait?" said Gerard. "Whose portrait?"

"Miss Jolly's," said Hiram, fearing to pronounce the name, but being compelled to answer.

"I suppose," said Gerard, "that the portmanteau is still here?"

"I believe it is," said Hiram.

"Let me see it," said Gerard, rising. "Is the portrait still there?" Hiram could not say. "Let us see," his master said, and, turning to the door, led the way to the room Val Strange had occupied. "Open it," glancing at the portmanteau. Hiram obeyed, and tumbled the things over. The portrait was gone, but the envelope was there still, and Hiram held it up.

"It was in this," he said.

Gerard took it from his outstretched hand, and turned it over, and read the inscription—"Thy grace being gained, cures all disgrace in me." A short, hard laugh escaped him, and he folded the envelope with great care, and put it in his pocket-book. But half a dozen times in the course of the day Hiram saw him looking at it with an expression which betokened no good for the writer of the line. "Go on," he said coldly, when he had put back his pocket-book, with the envelope in it. Hiram told the story as we know it.

"Is there a gentleman in your case, too?" asked Gerard. "Are we in the same boat, Search?"

"I don't like his way of takin' it at all," said Hiram to himself, returning no audible answer to that cynical inquiry. "It looks mischeevous."

"If there should prove to be a gentleman in your case, what shall you do, Search?" asked Gerard.

Hiram liked his tone and manner less than ever. "I

shall let him slide," he said, "and I shall think myself well out of a bad bargain."

"*I* sha'n't let him slide, Search," said Gerard, very, very softly. He had a hand on Hiram's arm, and gripped it so that he made him wince. There was not another word spoken between them; and Gerard, though Hiram saw him several times reading the line on the frayed envelope, never recurred to the subject.

It need scarcely be said that the names of the runaways were never spoken in his presence, or that in spite of that fact they were much talked of. Many a time the sound of Gerard's solid step hushed the talk of his mother and Milly; but the young fellow's stony face never gave a sign that he knew the theme of their converse. Many and many an unspeakable pang his loyal heart suffered, but after the one outburst he did everything. There was much to trouble his mother in those hard days; but she took everything as women do, with that sublime and quiescent heroism which is the best of their many virtues. A good wife and mother—how shall she be praised? Not—though the wise man of old so praised her—that she seeketh wool and flax and worketh willingly with her hands, and, like the merchant's ships, bringeth her food from afar; but yet as the wise man praised her, that the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, and that her children have a right to arise and call her blessed. Though she feared for Gerard, in the unnatural calm he bore, she was yet not without pride in him. He was a man, this baby she had nursed. Oh, quaint and sweet and pitiful! she remembered—she saw—the infant almost every time she looked at the man, and had just such a tenderness for him now as she had when she nursed him, and no less a desire to protect and defend him. It was one of the poor soul's griefs that she could protect and defend him no longer. Mothers suffer in that way. And yet she was proud that her son bore his grief manfully, and stood under Fate's heaviest inflictions in this rock-like calm, that would not move till riven. Amongst her griefs was one which I must needs indicate; but I leave it with an indication and no more. From the time of Constance's flight, Gerard refused to set foot in a church, or to sit at that decent ordinance of family worship which had always formed one of the household ways. In other matters, he did with a certain heaviness and solidity

of manner, as though it were a task, what he had once done gracefully and naturally. He was much alone, riding solitary over the moors and about the coast. He liked to have Hiram with him at times; but he very rarely spoke to him. The gaunt Yankee could ride as well as he could do anything else, and he used to hang a little behind his master, mounted on a nervous finicking thoroughbred, ruling him with half-unconscious skillful hand, whilst he kept his eyes for the most part fixed on the figure ahead of him. The whole country-side became familiar with Gerard, riding lonely, or paired with Hiram; and the general sympathy was loud on his side, and deep in its condemnation of Val Strange.

And now from purpling moors, and fields yellowing to the sickle, and a sky of English haze, let us get to the Mediterranean and join the wedded lovers. The sea is of that perfect blue which only lives in its waters. Every slow-heaving wave that falls against the vessel's side looks hollowed from some translucent liquid jewel—the color of the sapphire is shallow by the side of it—and every time the crest tumbles over, it shakes and breaks into diamonds. The sunlight rains down a million little arrowy points of light upon the waters. There is land on each side, if those purple cloud-like fantasies that seem to rise and fall at such vast distances are really of the earth and earthy.

Val and Constance are lolling near each other on the deck in cane chairs, sheltered from the sun-god's too savage courtship of the sea by a canvas awning.

"You are sad, Val," said Constance, looking up from her book.

"Not I," said Val, brightening a little, and withdrawing his eyes from some dreamland in which, to judge by his looks, he had seen unpleasant things. "Why should I be sad?" His looks caressed her as he turned to her.

"Who knows?" she said, and lay back silent for awhile.

"You are not sad, are you?" he asked after a pause.

"No," she answered with a ghost of a smile. "Why should I be sad?"

"Like a good wife," said Val, "you base your reasoning on mine."

She smiled faintly in answer, and again they were silent. But in real truth they were both sad, and there was a

reason for their sadness. If a man sins, however sweetly, he is pretty sure to suffer for it; and now Val's own scorn was master of him, and in proportion to the very virtues left in him, he suffered. He was never altogether free of Gerard's face, and the accusations it had power to bring against him. A dull man sins with comparative impunity. An imaginative man, who has a heart to feel his own imaginations, suffers out of all proportion, and is yet justly served, inasmuch as he has sinned more deeply, having the more virtue in him to sin against, and seeing beforehand whither he is bound. And so Val and Constance, having sacrificed so much in order to be happy, were unhappy after all. Alas, it was always so. Of what avail can it be to preach a sermon here? There is no royal road to happiness, along which no pains shall be endured.

Constance arose and looked over the little vessel's side at the sparkling waters; and after awhile Val joined her.

"This is all very wonderfully beautiful," she said, with a little wave of her white hand.

"Yes," Val assented.

"What is that splendid jewel out there?" she asked. "I suppose when we come nearer, we shall find it a mere rocky island. What is it called?"

"I don't know, darling," said Val, drearily.

"Get out your sailing maps," she said, striving to occupy his thoughts, "and let us find the names of the places we are passing."

Val obeyed her; and having descended to the cabin, returned with a roll of charts, laid them on a table, had a brief talk with his sailing-master, and having discovered the position of the yacht, began to name the islands here and there. Constance with forced animation stood over him and assisted in the search. He looked up suddenly, and their eyes met. Val dropped his gaze and walked to the side again; and as Constance bent above the charts, a tear fell upon them. She could not please, she could not soothe him; she had no power to exorcise this demon of regret. She left the deck and went below; and Val, having hung awhile over the rail, turned and missed her. He began to fold up the charts, and saw the great starred teardrop on one of them, and his heart fell lower and lower. Somewhat suddenly he lit a cigar and paced to and fro upon the deck. He loved her with his whole heart; there

was nothing he would not do to make her happy, if he could but see his way to it. He was sure of her love in turn, and yet they were both moody, both unhappy.

The French cynic proclaimed that two things were essential to happiness—a hard heart and a good digestion. Though I should be inclined to widen the list a little, I do not think I should quarrel with the essentials. A hard heart is a great help to personal comfort. If you can pass a shivering beggar in a snow-storm and feel your own broadcloth no reproach to you, that is in its way a gain. Perhaps—human nature is perverse—perhaps you would rather be without the gain, though not, in spite of pity, without the broadcloth. This life is but a twisted skein for a man with a conscience. With a hard heart, great gift, you may push through the thin filamental knots almost without an effort. If they are made of human nerves, the nerves are not yours. What resolute creature, bent on happiness, can be stopped upon his way by cobwebs?

But here were two people of more than common tenderness, and they suffered. The very narrowness of the life which, in the double egotism of their love, they sought to live, added to their miseries, and made *ennui* and regret inevitable. It would have been wiser to have looked for a refuge in society than in this loneliness; but though both of them knew this, neither of them altogether cared to say it.

In awhile, little Mary came on deck to tell her master that dinner was laid in the cabin; and he descended. Fish and flesh of the daintiest, fruits, and wines of famous vintage; and love at the table too, with manly grace and feminine beauty, and yet no joy in anything. They came on deck again, and found the awning cleared away, and a Mediterranean sunset in the skies. A miracle of color from zenith to horizon, and the purpled rosy golden glory flushing, though more faintly to the very east. But in the west from which they fleeted, the dying sun was clothed in splendors which were past all speech, and all the fiery solemn regalities of color in the sky were imaged in the heaving sea upon a million broken mirrors. From form to form, from tone to tone, from gradual change to change, the glory stole downward into gloom, till here and there, amid the shadowed wrack of skyey gallery and tower, a

clear star shimmered, and the day was dead, and night unrolled her own calm panorama. Now there were voices in the waves, and murmurs in the air, and mystery and darkness were abroad. The sad-hearted wedded lovers paced together on the deck, until the mood arose, to build a new city in the clouds, with many a long-drawn parapet and frowning battlement. There are hours when every mood of Nature's suits the soul, and these were of them. Val and Constance paused, hidden by the little deck-house from the man who held the wheel. They were all alone, and all the world to each other, but they embraced with tears, and cheek touched cheek coldly. There was a cry in the heart of each—*my* fault!

"You know I love you," he murmured with melancholy tenderness. "How can I make you happy?"

"There is but one way," she answered, clinging to him. "Let me see *you* happy!"

Sad embraces followed. The prescription was one he had no power to fulfill, and they both knew it.

It was at Corfu that they first received English letters. There was one from Reginald to Val, which said simply: "SIR,—My opinion of your conduct is probably of little value to you, though you do me the honor to solicit it, and to offer what seems intended as a defense of your own proceedings. Perhaps, however, I shall indicate it clearly enough if I express my desire to hear no more of you. I am, sir, your obedient servant, REGINALD JOLLY." This stung the recipient a little, but not much. A kinder farewell would have been bitterer to him, for he was one of those men who harden at reproof, but melt at pardon. There was a letter for Constance from her father, in which he, from a heart metaphorically bleeding and broken, quite forgave her. He would rejoice, he said, to welcome her back again to that torn and shattered organ, and was at present living in Paris, where he would be delighted at any time to see her. The emotional gymnastics of this epistle had no effect upon the reader. She handed it to her husband, who, not being even yet so depressed that all humor was dull to him, chuckled above it with a half hollow enjoyment. But Aunt Lucretia wrote a letter, which bore upon its pages the marks of tears, and in it, with many cruel upbraidings, she told Constance how the news had been brought to Lumby Hall, and how Gerard had received

it. Constance would fain have left this letter unread, but the lines seemed somehow to fascinate her, and she could not get away from them.

"What is it troubles you?" her husband asked her, standing near whilst she read, crying and sobbing. She held the letter out to him. "Yes," she answered, rising in a sudden tempest. "It was your doing. Read it." And with that, she swept from the room, dropped her veil, and walked out of the hotel, angry with herself, angry with him, and bitterly remorseful.

Val obeyed her injunction, and felt the sting of it before he had gone far. "She was right," he said, standing with drooping head, with the letter at his feet, and his hands depending nervelessly over it. "It was my doing, and the punishment belongs to both of us." From that hour the unhappy wedded pair had no power to comfort or console each other. They went on to Constantinople in a wretched reserve, broken by bickerings which ended in reconciliations, but always left the breach between them a little wider. At one of the Pera hotels, Constance met friends of hers, who received her with great cordiality, and with them she and Val crossed over to Cairo. The rainy season came on, and Val gave the party yacht-room, and carried them to Naples, where they proposed to winter. The yacht hung in the bay, and for a brief month or two Constance threw herself into the pleasures of society, and was acknowledged the reigning beauty of the place. Val took to short absences, little regretted on either side; and at last with simple coldness, outwardly, though with the frost of downright despair in their hearts, they parted at Christmas-time, and Val sailed alone up the gloomy Adriatic to Venice, and left it disgusted in eight-and-forty hours, and sailed back to the Mediterranean, and everywhere carried his broken hopes and his remorses with him.

About the end of January, Gerard was on a visit, when some people unknown to him, and knowing nothing of his story, came to stay in the same house with him. One of them told the tale of Mr. Strange's curious desertion of his charming wife. Mrs. Strange was fascinating all the world of Naples, and Mr. Strange was yachting about alone—at that time of year too, and was it not extraordinary?

"Hiram," said Gerard that evening, "I shall want you to come with me to London to-morrow."

Hiram quietly assented, and began to get things ready for the journey.

"If that man's come back again," said the watchful body-guard, looking at his master's face, "I shall have to keep a pretty sharp lookout to hold you out of mischief. I've got my score against Valentine Strange, Esquire; but I ain't goin' to see you hanged for him, mister. Not if I dog you like a shadder!"

CHAPTER XLI.

"MOTHER," SAID GERARD ON THE EVENING OF HIS RETURN, "I AM GOING ABROAD."

NEXT day, Gerard and Hiram were in London. The master stood with a little scrap of newspaper in his hand, on the hearth-rug of a cheerless room in an hotel; and the servant watched his countenance furtively, and drew but little comfort from it. Snow had fallen in the streets, and the sky was leaden and cheerless. The hotel was far-away East, out of Hiram's knowledge of town; and he was all curiosity to know what was afoot, and fear lest the enterprise should be dangerous for Gerard. For Hiram firmly believed that the young fellow had bent himself to have revenge upon the man who had wrecked his life; and though he would willingly have looked on at any such ceremony as a horsewhipping, he feared that no such vengeance would satisfy Gerard.

"Search!"

"Sir?"

"Bring me my overcoat, and wrap yourself up well. It's a bitter day."

"More snow, I think, by and by," said Hiram. The statement about the weather included almost every unnecessary word Gerard had spoken to him for at least a week, and he was hungry for conversation. His overture met with no answer, however, and he retired. "Might as well valet a dumb man," reflected Hiram, "and be deaf and dumb myself." Master and man prepared to face the cheerless streets. "Come with me," said Gerard; and set out, Hiram following. He walked briskly eastward, pausing at times to make inquiries; and after a journey of per-

haps a mile, stopped before a pair of great wooden gates, and rang a bell, the handle of which nestled in the wall, almost hidden by finely powdered snow. Behind the gates there was a great clanging of hammers on resounding iron; and when the small door-way in the gate was opened, Hiram, looking through, saw a boiler-maker's yard, and men at work there vigorously. "What on airth," said Hiram to himself, "brings the boss to a place like this? Is he going to cure himself with business? Best thing he could do." Gerard asked a question of the man who opened the gate. His follower was deafened by the noise of hammers, and caught neither it nor the answer; but pursued him across a slushy yard with tracts of melting snow in it, to a counting-house which stood beside a dry-dock. Here a grimy personage received them, and in answer to Gerard's inquiry for the principal, indicated himself.

"You have a yacht for sale or hire?" said Gerard.

"Half a dozen," said the grimy principal.

"A steam-yacht, iron-built, 'Channel Queen'?"

"Yes; for sale or hire. Selling price, eight thousand. Hire—crew included—hundred and twenty a month."

"Can I see her?" asked Gerard. The grimy personage rang a bell; and a grimier than himself answering the summons, he nodded sideways to Gerard, jerked out "Show 'Channel Queen,'" and disappeared. The new-comer led them into the yard. Snow had begun to fall again, and the place was indescribably dreary. Hiram's thoughts were in keeping with it; but there was one comforting reflection in his mind. "He means to take me with him," he thought; "and he'll have to get over my body to do it when the time comes." Two minutes' walking brought them to the side of the Thames, and the grimy man raised his voice dolefully, and called a wherryman, who stood smoking and watching the dirty tide of the river, a hundred yards away, with his back against a sheltering mass of timber. The man hurried up. "Show 'Channel Queen,'" said the grimy guide, and retraced his steps. The wherryman grunted, and unfastening a boat that swung at the shiny and rotting piles upon the edge of the river, Gerard and Hiram seated themselves, and the man pulled across the river.

"Do you know the 'Channel Queen'?" Gerard asked as they went.

"Know her?" said the boatman, with a gratuitous execration; "why shouldn't I know her?"

"Is she a fast boat?"

"Fast? Ay; she's fast enough. There she is. Look at her. Did y'ever see a boat with them lines on her as wasn't fast? Not you. Nor me neither. Screw, *she* is. Engines a bit too powerful. Jolts her like, when you drives her hard, her engines does. 'Eadachy sort of craft to travel in; but"—with other verbal gratuities—"can't she walk!"

"Can't I go on board her?" asked Gerard.

"Who said you couldn't?" inquired the man ungraciously; and pulling nearer, caught a hanging chain. "Up you get," he said, with a grin; "nobody's a-hindering of you, mister." Gerard seized the chain, and with some damage to his gloves, went up hand over hand, and swung on to the deck. "'Taint the first time he's been aboard a yacht, *I* know," said the boatman, turning on Hiram. "Navy, may be; eh, mister?" Hiram made no answer, but listened to the hollow footsteps of his master on the deck, until he lost them. After a pause of perhaps five minutes, Gerard came to the rail of the vessel and called him: "Come up here, Search."

Hiram went up the shallow side like an exaggerated monkey, and the boatman looked after him. "Reg'lar old salts the pair of 'em," he said; and having knocked the still burning ashes of his pipe into the brim of his hat, nursed them carefully from the wind whilst he refilled, tilted them back again, and smoked on contented.

"Do you know anything about this kind of thing, Search?" asked Gerard, stamping a foot on the deck.

"I've knocked about 'em a bit," said Hiram. "I was stoker aboard one o' the Messagerie vessels for a year; an' steward's man aboard an Atlantic steamer for three v'y'ges. It stands to reason I looked about a bit; but I ain't a conny-sure. Hello, what's that?" A head appearing above deck startled the usually immovable Hiram.

"Man cleaning engines," said Gerard, who had caught the infection for that verbal economy which seemed to live about the "Channel Queen." "Come and look at her."

They went over the little vessel together, Hiram making observations here and there. Gerard dumb again. When they had inspected every part of her, they left, and were pulled back across the river; and the wherryman, richer by

half a crown, returned to his sheltering heap of timber. Gerard led the way to the office, and entering, said briefly: "I can have 'Channel Queen' examined, I suppose?"

"When you like."

"When can she sail, if I take her?"

"When you've got crew aboard and fires up."

"Do you provision crew, if I hire her?"

"No; you do."

"Good-morning," said Gerard.

"Good-morning," replied the grimy man, and shot away again.

Away once more plodded master and servant through the miry streets, the former inquiring here and there as before. This time their wanderings ended in an office, where, for the consideration of a ten-pound note, a gentleman undertook to examine the "Channel Queen" and to report upon her seaworthiness and general capacity. Next Hiram was sent off in one direction with orders for stores, to be held in readiness for immediate delivery; whilst Gerard went another way on a like errand; and so the whole day passed busily. The next day was dull and idle; but on the next a perfectly satisfactory report of the yacht having reached him, Gerard hired her for six months, paid a deposit, left references, and in great haste traveled homeward. During all this time, Hiram had felt quite clear about his master's purpose, but had puzzled himself a good deal to divine the reason which had set him so suddenly upon it, after having rested quiescent for more than half a year. The explanation came, by an unlooked-for source.

"Mother," said Gerard, on the evening of his return, "I am going abroad." He had always been fairly accustomed to his own way; his father's "Very well, my lad," having been ready in answer to most of his proposals; and latterly nobody had questioned his comings and goings.

"Not for long, I hope?" said Mrs. Lumby.

"No," said Gerard; "probably not for long."

His mother would not enter any protest against his going, but it cost her a pang for all that. Gerard's manner was not encouraging to hope, and she believed that he was but going away to brood over his misery; but he was so hard and stern of late, that she did not dare to venture upon any dissuasion. Milly was bolder.

"Where are you going, Gerard?" she asked.

"Where fate leads me," he answered, with a pallid smile.

"You are uncertain?"

"At present, yes."

It was in her mind to ask him why he was going, and she had already framed the words in which to present her question; but he fixed his eyes upon her in a way which seemed at once to anticipate inquiry, and refuse an answer. She would not have felt that, but for the suspicion which filled her thoughts. He was going to seek out Val Strange—perhaps to challenge him to a duel in one of those foreign countries in which Val made his shifting home. How could she be sure of this? Not by interrogating Gerard, who would assuredly return no answer. Perhaps by questioning Hiram. She resolved to question Hiram. Milly had a little bower of a sitting-room—her own—in which in happier times she had been wont to entertain her friends; the scene of many a girlish confidence and frolic. Meeting Hiram in the corridor outside, she summoned him to this apartment.

"Do you know that Mr. Gerard is going abroad?" she asked.

"I believe he is, miss," responded Hiram.

"Do you know where he is going?"

"Well, I can't truthfully say I do," he answered.

"Do you know why he is going?" she demanded. There was an anxiety in her manner which Hiram fully shared. He seemed to see ahead a worse trouble than had yet fallen upon the House; and though he was but newly in its service, there was no man who ate the bread of the Lumbys who was more devoted to them than he.

"Wal, miss," he returned, tentatively, "I am not in Mr. Gerard's confidence, up to now."

Her woman's wit and native penetration told her that his suspicions clashed with hers. "Mr. Search," she said, standing before him with pale and clasped petitionary hands, "may I trust you?" She did not think of her own attitude, or of the appeal in her voice, but, taken together with his own fears, they touched Hiram profoundly.

"Miss," he said, "you may safely trust me with your life."

"You know the whole miserable story of your master and—Mr. Strange?" He inclined his head gravely. "I

have heard," she went on, "the circumstances which induced my cousin to take you into his service"—Hiram waved a deprecatory hand at that allusion, and his sallow cheek flushed a little—"and I believe you are attached to him."

"That is so, miss," said Hiram, with preternatural gravity.

"At that wretched time," said Milly, "one of our fears was that Mr. Gerard would attempt some terrible revenge upon Mr. Strange."

"That was my idea, tew," he answered.

"And now the same fear returns," she said, with a face of pallor.

"Miss," said Hiram, "excuse me. I should go with you, if it wa'n't for one thing. He's kept as quiet as a winter dormouse for half a year. Why should he fire up now, without anything to set a light to him?"

"There is a reason," said Milly, in response. "Mr. Strange and his wife are living apart from each other."

"He knows that?" inquired Hiram.

"He knows," she returned. "Mr. Strange is sailing from place to place in the Levant, and his wife is living at Naples." At that news, a sudden certainty shot into Hiram's mind, and declared itself so plainly in his face that Milly saw it at a glance. She made a step toward him. "What do you know?"

"There air circumstances," said Hiram, with deliberative slowness, "when the or'nary rules of honorable conduct must be set on one side. I think this is one of 'em. I ain't pledged to silence, but that's *no* matter. Has Mr. Gerard Lumby told you, miss, that he's hired anything in London city, lately?"

"No," she answered, half bewildered.

"Well, he has." He paused again. "He's hired—a yacht; and he's goin' to sail in her—"

"In pursuit of Valentine Strange!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Search, this must be prevented. Think," she said, twining her hands together, "of the misery it will bring upon us all—his mother, his father, all who value him."

"I'm afraid," said Hiram, deeply moved by her distress, and sharing in it, "it'll be about as useful to try and turn him as it would be if he was St. Paul's Cathedral."

"Have you spoken to him?" she asked. He shook his head sadly. "Will you?"

"It ain't any use me speakin' to him," he responded, mournfully. "No, miss. I might as well throw stones at the solar system." He stood despondently for a moment, and then added, but with no great hopefulness: "*You* might try him."

"I *will* try him," she answered, and left Hiram standing there.

His large dark eyes and sallow features, were full of mourning. "'Tain't a spark and out again with the boss," he said sadly. "Slow, steady goes the bellows all the time, and he's white hot to the core. I know the sort. It's British. And an uncommon ugly sort is to have agen you. Yes, sir." Then with a sudden change of face and figure, he said: "Hiram, may be you'll be wanted yet. Mark my words, young man, and be on the spot when you air wanted. When the time comes, Hiram, you *will* be wadted—real bad."

CHAPTER XLII.

"MISTER THERE'S A SCORE OF LIVING SOULS ABOARD THAT CRAFT. LET GO THE WHEEL."

MILLY found Gerard alone in the smoking-room. He was not smoking or reading, but simply standing with his hands in his coat-pockets, staring out of the window at the rain. At her entrance, he looked round, but turned back to the window without a word.

"Gerard," she said tremulously, "are you quite resolved on leaving us? Can you not be prevailed upon to stay?"

"Why should I stay?" he asked in answer.

She took sudden courage, and advancing, laid her hands upon his arm. "*Vengeance is mine*," she said; "*I will repay.*" He looked swiftly down upon her, and away again. "Gerard, dear Gerard they are unhappy already. They have parted. Their own consciences were against them. You have suffered enough, but you have nothing to repent."

"Good-bye, Milly," he answered very gently. "My train starts in an hour. I sha'n't see you again, most likely."

His manner was so quiet that he might not have heard her words. But the imminence of the danger which she saw so clearly braced her for a moment.

"Gerard," she urged him, "do not go upon this journey, Think of your father, and his sorrows. Think of your mother. Or if you will go, promise me that you will not follow—him."

A curious look crossed his face. "Did you care for Val Strange?" he asked. "You were'n't in love with him, were you?"

"No, no!" she cried. At another time, such a question concerning any man would have called a blush to her face, but now she scarcely noticed it. "Promise me you will not follow him."

"Good-bye, Milly," he said again, as gently as before. But she clung to him with tears, and would not let him go.

"Stay!" she pleaded passionately—"stay! For the sake of all who love you, stay!"

"Nothing of this," he said, with an approach to sternness in his tones, "to any one but me. Remember that. Good-bye, again." He had always seen her so timid and so yielding until now, that her persistence amazed him. She clung to him with both hands; and without violence, which was impossible, he could not escape her. Seeing this, he stood with passionless sullen patience, and she wasted entreaty on a human rock. In the intensity of her eagerness, she tried to move him by force from where he stood; but she was so feeble and small, and he so great and strong, that with all her vehemence she could not sway him by a hair's-breadth. It was all so fearfully plain to her now, so certain that he meant the worst! "Stay!" she wept, dragging at him with all her feeble strength. He answered never a word. The terror mounted higher and higher in her heart, and she assailed him incoherently. He must not, must not go, to break all their hearts.

"Hearts are not so easily broken," he answered at last. It was like a statue speaking.

"You will break mine!" she cried.

"Poor Milly," he answered gently—"poor Milly!" Suddenly she crimsoned, on brow and cheek and throat, and her hands dropped from him. He kissed her on the forehead and passed from the room. The drooping, weeping figure, and the manner of his parting from it, crossed him

many a time, later on, when his heart had softened and his longing for revenge was stilled.

He said the rest of his few farewells, and went up to London with Hiram. They drove straight to the river side, and found the yacht almost in readiness to weigh anchor. It was significant to Hiram of the eagerness which lay beneath his master's stony exterior that he slept on board. Next morning came the sailing-master, a cheery-looking old man, with a face the color of a brick wall, and silver hair and whiskers. He told Gerard that he had sailed the yacht for its last owner, and was full of her praises. In the afternoon they started, in a heavy snow-storm; but before they reached Greenwich a small mutiny came about. One of the crew, who had been drinking too freely with his friends ashore, approached the captain.

"Beggin' pardon for bein' so bold, cap'n," he said. "I ain't a-going to sail in this yere crarft."

"Oh," said the captain, good-humoredly enough, "I think you are."

"No; I ain't," returned the seaman hoarsely. "Not if I swims for it."

"What's the matter?" asked Gerard, who was standing near.

"This crarft's unlucky, *she* is," the man responded; "and no good'll come of her."

"What's the matter with her?" asked Gerard. A little chill came over him.

"Why, it's Friday to begin with," said the man; "and as if that worn't sufficient, we're thirteen aboard. 'Theer's you, cap'n, and the mate, and four of us, and that's six; and theer's a galley-cook and a cabin-cook, and that's eight; and theer's the engineer and a brace o' stokers, and that's eleven; and the gentleman here, and the Yankee cove, and that's thirteen; and I ain't a-goin' to sail in this yere crarft."

"Go to your duty," said the captain, with a laugh. "We shall have three more aboard at Greenwich," he added; "and I never heard, sir," turning to Gerard, "that sixteen was an unlucky number."

"We starts with thirteen," said the man, with drunken doggedness; "and I don't sail aboard of this yere crarft."

"Better set him ashore," said Gerard. "I'm not an

idler, and my man is an old salt. We shall not be short-handed."

"Very well, sir," returned the captain. "But I wouldn't listen to a fool like that, sir. He'll be all right in the morning, when he's sober."

"I won't sail in this yere crarft," the man repeated.

"Well, I don't want any Jonahs aboard me," returned the captain, who may have had his qualms about unlucky numbers too. And so, when the boat which carried the remainder of the crew came alongside, the objector, with his belongings, was put into it, and dismissed with derisive hoots and groans by his comrades of an hour. "Yah! Jonah!" The self-discharged stood up in the stern. "You'll come to no good," he roared; "I tell you so; you'll come to no good." And in the vehemence of his repudiation of them, he fell over sideways and dived headlong into Thames. The two boatmen hauled him out, and the men aboard the yacht were in fits of laughter. But there was one saturnine face among them. It was of course more than sufficiently absurd that a man of culture should be affected by the vaticinations of a drunken sailor; but the superstitions inherent in the heart live on in defiance of cultivation. Gerard, now that he came to think of it, would rather have sailed on any day in the seven than Friday, and would rather have carried any number at starting than thirteen. He sneered down these ridiculous fears, but they lived again in spite of him.

It was rough in the Channel, whose waters rather lorded it over their "Queen," and it was rougher in the Bay of Biscay. But being once past Gibraltar, they found peace in the waters of the Mediterranean until they came south of the Adriatic, where a fierce wind roared down from the Austrian Alps, and got to cross-purposes with a wicked gale which swept westward from the gates of the Black Sea, and made wild work for a time. The "Channel Queen" touched here and there, and Gerard went ashore and came on board again. To Trieste. Across to Venice. Southward again to Brindisi. Then to Larnaca, a long stretch; and at Larnaca, he got the wished-for news. The yacht "Mew's-wing" sailed yesterday, bound for Alexandria. It was at the end of the second week in March, and in that happy region the sun was already warm and the air balmy. As the yacht left Larnaca behind,

Gerard stood on deck looking straight beyond the prow, beating with one foot on the plank beneath him; and on his face there was a look of steadfast waiting, with now and then the merest transient flash of exultation. Hiram marked the new elasticity of his walk, and caught once or twice the gleam in his eyes. Not another soul aboard guessed the purpose of the cruise.

Master and servant were alike popular on board the little vessel, and each took his duty manfully. A day out from Cyprus shores, a heavy squall came on, and Gerard and Hiram did rather more than their fair share in it. The storm lasted ten hours, and when it had blown itself out, they went below, and slept. Eight hours later, Gerard came on deck.

"Seen anything?" he asked, briefly.

"Sail on the weather-bow, sir," said the mate, offering his glass.

Gerard took it, and looked long. "What are we making?" he asked at last.

"About twelve, sir," said the mate.

"There's no hurry," said Gerard. "It's a lovely morning. Slacken down a bit."

"You'll find it a little heavy, sir, if you slacken speed. She rolls a good deal already."

"Never mind," he answered; "we are in no hurry now." The mate transmitted the master's orders, and the throb of the engines came slower on the ear. The change brought up Hiram Search, and he, setting his legs apart, scanned sea and sky. After a momentary observation, he gave a sudden start, and diving below, returned with marine glasses, and fixed the craft ahead.

"Hiram," he said under his breath, "you'll be wanted by and by, or I'm mistaken."

"What is that craft doing, do you think?" asked Gerard, addressing the mate.

"She's making about our speed, sir," the mate answered.

Gerard went below, and spent the day in his own cabin. Hiram hung uneasily about the vessel; now here, now there, and passed whole hours in watching the "Mew's-wing" as she courtesied, with half her white canvas set, to wind and sea. He knew every line of her long ago, and had recognized her at first sight. Toward nightfall, the

wind failed, and having less way on her, she courtesied more and more. A wonderful moon arose, and the whole sea and sky lay bathed in her light.

"Hard times lately, sir," said the captain cheerily, when Gerard came on deck.

"Never mind," said Gerard quietly. "Take another spell below. I'll sail her to-night. I feel wakeful."

The captain protested, but Gerard insisted; and having made what he thought a decent resistance, the old man went down. He knew the master of the "Channel Queen" for a thorough sailor by this time, and was willing enough to get an extra snooze. "You may tell the engineer to get a little extra way on," said Gerard. "Let us see what she can do. You can sleep without rocking."

The captain laughed a cheery "Good-night, sir," as he went down.

The measured jar of the propeller grew swifter, and the speed of the craft greater. An hour later, Gerard went below for a minute, and returned with a bottle of rum beneath his pilot-coat. There were two seamen on deck, one at the wheel, and one at the bows. The sea gleamed wide beneath the moonlight, and slowly sunk to peace after the squall, now at rest for sixteen hours. "I'll take the wheel," said Gerard, quietly handing the bottle to the man. "You and your chum there can drink my health if you like. You may both go down for an hour or two. I'll call you when I'm tired." And now the deck was clear, and Gerard held the wheel.

"Great heavens!" murmured the wretched faithful Hiram, watchful of all, though unobserved. "Is it goin' to be as bad and base as this?"

The moonbeams fell wide and soft upon the rolling sea, and the rolling sail of the "Mew's-wing" shot now and again in a silver gleam across the black edge of the liquid disk. The silver gleam rose higher, creeping up and up into the sky, and growing broader as it climbed. The helmsman steered, and the sole eyes under heaven that saw his purpose, watched. Stiff and chilled to the bone, Hiram crawled on deck and looked ahead.

"Who's there?" said Gerard.

"You musn't do this, mister," said Hiram, advancing and laying a hand upon one of the spokes of the wheel. The "Mew's-wing" was scarce a quarter of a mile ahead,

and the steam-yacht was in a line for her, going at full speed. Gerard looked at him without a word. "I could call the crew and stop it in a minute, mister," said Hiram hoarsely; "but I don't want to let it out that Gerard Lumby ever meant wholesale murder. Stand aside! You won't, you madman? You shall!" He set his hands to the wheel; but he might as well have tried to lift the boat as to turn back the grip that guided her. "Mister, there's a score of living souls aboard that craft. Let go the wheel!"

Gerard looked straight on, with a face as rigid as stone.

"Hollo, there!" yelled a voice. "Ahoy! ahoy! Where are you coming to? Port! port!"

The "Channel Queen" bore down. Hiram took his master by the waist and tore at him like a madman. The vessels were very near each other now.

"You'll forgive me some day," said Hiram, and releasing Gerald, he retired a little, and then sprung forward like a flash and felled him with one blow to the deck. Then he seized the wheel and tore it round, jammed it hard down and closed his eyes. Confused wild cries were in his ears, and he looked out again. The yacht was within twenty yards of them, but safe. There was a figure that he knew leaning forward from the shrouds, and Gerard was on his feet again, shaking a clinched hand at it. The clinched hand opened a denouncing forefinger, and a voice rang out: "I shall have you yet, Val Strange!"

And the "Channel Queen" swept on, and left the "Mew's-wing" far behind.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE HORROR OF THE VENGEANCE HIS ENEMY HAD PURPOSED LEFT VAL UNHINGED AND TERROR-STRICKEN.

MORNING broke bright and beautiful. "Mr. Search, Mr. Search," said the captain, with a half-comic, half-serious glance at Hiram, "somebody's been steering a queer course lately."

"We went out a point or two to look at that yacht," said Hiram shiftily.

"And lost your reckoning afterward," said the captain.

"I thought you were better sailors both of you. Might be running for Odessa this way rather than Alexandria."

"Well," returned Hiram, feigning ill-temper, "you can steer the ship yourself, captain. I reckon it's your business."

The genial old skipper stared after him as he left the deck. "What makes him so sore all of a sudden?" he wondered. But he never spoke again of the night's wayward steering, and perhaps that served Hiram Search's turn.

As for Gerard, he showed little difference of manner. Hiram, when he was left alone, and the "Mew's-wing" had faded out of sight in the gray mist of morning, found time to think matters over, and came to the conclusion that he would have to encounter one of two things—a passionate and profound resentment, or a gratitude equally passionate and profound. Gerard gave sign of neither the one nor the other, but met him almost as if nothing had happened. "British again," said Hiram; but Gerard's behavior was not the less bewildering to him that he pretended thus lightly to find a solution for it.

Meantime, aboard the "Mew's-wing" there were amazement and dread. Every man aboard had known the story of their owner's treachery to his friend in some garbled and distorted form. But Val, from the first gathering of the crew together, had been a favorite with them all, and in their eyes the elopement had been the triumph of true love over unknown obstacles. The rough fellows liked Romance, like the rest of the world; and Constance, who could be haughty and cold enough to social equals, had never been anything but gracious and kindly to those below her, and had, by dint of her regal beauty and her gentleness, enlisted all these hearts at once. They could not tell why she and Val had parted; but they talked about the parting, and thought about it, and had queer stories to explain it. Gerard had been once aboard the "Mew's-wing," and in the awful moment when the steam yacht crossed her, Val was not the only man who recognized him. The wild cry of the lookout had brought them all on deck, and the lookout himself had seen the struggle at the wheel, and had beheld the blow which saved the yacht and every soul on board. The men talked these things over, and by and by murmurs of rage and fear began to rise

amongst them. After a while they came forward in a body, and setting forth their spokesman, demanded, through him, to be run into the nearest port and there disbanded.

"Us thinks, sir," said the spokesman, respectfully but firmly, "as after what took place this morning, no man's life's safe aboard this craft." A murmur of assent encouraged him. "It's clear the party meant to run us down; an' him being steam, an' us being canvas, the odds is all agen us. All fair and proper risks us is willing to run, sir, but not that. Some of us is married, an' some of us ain't; but us has all got our lives to look after, an' what us says is: 'Make a clean run for the nearest port, pay us our doos, an' leave us to shift for ourselves.' That's it, I think, my lads?"

That was it, said a rough murmur from behind him. The horror of the vengeance his enemy had proposed left Val unhinged and terror-stricken. He was not a coward; but in view of the deadly hatred Gerard's attempt bespoke, his common courage left him. It was scarcely likely, he told himself, that he would long escape a revenge so ready to stick at nothing; but even at the push of desperation, he could not feel justified in dragging all these people into his own risk. He gave way without a word of protest.

"My lads," he said, "I can not say that I share your belief; but since you hold it, I will let you have your way."

"Not share the belief, sir?" said the skipper. "Why Thomson saw the struggle, and you know what the moonlight was. You don't mean to say you think they didn't see us?"

"You may be sure of this, Soulsby," said Val, as quietly as he could—"since the struggle did take place, the attempt will not be repeated. You don't suppose that any crew would allow their vessel to run another down, do you?"

"There's some comfort in that reflection, sir," said the skipper; and he passed the consolatory question to the mate, who passed it to the men. They agreed that one bloodthirsty madman would be as many as any one boat would be likely to carry at a time, and found satisfaction in the belief that by this time the late helmsman was probably in irons. "You'll report this to the consul when we land, of course, sir?"

"I don't see what good that would do, Soulsby," said Val.

"Well, sir," returned the skipper, "if you don't, I shall. And there'll be such a lookout kept aboard this boat as never was kept afore; and if the gentleman tries his game again, I'm a reasonably good shot and I shall have a fairish try to bring him down. I set a value on my life, sir," he concluded, and walked away indignantly.

No other attempt was made; and the sharpest lookout which could be kept failed to sight the "Channel Queen." But the skipper kept his word, and reported the affair to the British Consul when they reached their port; and the official sent for Val, and was for taking it up at once, as an unheard-of outrage. Val pooh-poohed the whole business.

"I never came near such a set of old women in my life," he declared. "The man at the wheel and some other fool were fighting, and only saw us just in time to clear us."

"But your sailing-master tells me that he heard the man threaten you by name," said the consul. "'I shall run you down, Val Strange,' or words to that effect, were used, he swears."

"Why not, 'if you're not run down, it's strange?'" questioned Val readily. He had been prepared for this.

The consul burst out laughing and admitted that this reading was the likelier of the two. After all, he said, Mr. Strange was the interested party, and not the skipper. The skipper called once more to know what was being done; and the consul told him briefly and with some scorn what color the yacht's owner had put upon the matter.

"It's well known to all of us," said the skipper, "who the man was that tried to run us down, and what was his reason for it. Mr. Strange ran away with the lady he was to marry, and married her himself; and as to the words, I'll swear to 'em before judge and jury."

In effect, the skipper went away in high anger. The consul told him that he was an insolent cross-grained fellow, and was himself left a good deal puzzled by the business. He felt bound to accept Val's view of it, however; and the skipper being paid to the uttermost farthing, went to England in the first homeward-bound vessel, a little mollified, but not to be converted from his own belief. He was, however, a man of discretion, and had many grounds

of gratitude to his late employer, and held his tongue between his teeth, therefore. Jacky Tar in general being discharged at his own desire, and plentifully supplied with money, sought his own joys and had his fling, and thought no more about his narrow escape than to make a foc'sle yarn of it.

The reason for Val's conduct was not far to seek, though it was somewhat complex. He admitted the gigantic wrong he had done against his friend, and was not so blind an egotist that he could not understand the injured man's longing for the wild justice of revenge. There was a feeling in his mind, too, that since he had left Gerard without any legal remedy an honorable man might try for, he was bound to accept the risk of any illegal remedy he might seek; and there was thus a sense in his mind that to ask the protection of the law would be base beyond anything he had done already. That is a sense in which I suppose that any high-minded man who will fancy himself in Val Strange's place will not find it difficult to share. And beyond these, which were more than sufficient for him, lay another reason: nothing could have been done, even had he willed it, without the introduction of Constance's name. Any one link in this chain might have served to hold him motionless.

The breach between himself and his wife was not a severance of love, but a confession of remorse. No man sins against his own high instincts with impunity; but there are some who are of fiber tough enough to long for pardon, and yet retain the offense. But Val and Constance, in the ordinary course of circumstances, should have been blameless people, leading lovable lives, and as happy as this hard world will allow to the happiest. He wrote to her sad, short letters, telling her he was here or there, and bound here or there; and she answered as shortly and as sadly. But now, to his surprise, came a letter urging him to return to her. He left his yacht in charge of the agent of an English shipping firm, instructing him to sell her, and took ship for Naples. May was drawing near, and all the exquisite country was in rich bloom. The Chiaja was crowded in the tranquil evenings; and there were trips to Posilippo by land, and trips to San Giovanna's Palace by moonlight, by water; and the gay southern city had fairly begun its long season of summer joys. Val had expected

to be asked to share in these, and had with heavy heart braced himself to bear the burden of festivity; but he found Constance pale and languid, and unlike her old self. She had news for him which would have revived his old tenderness had it needed revival, and which brought him to her feet again with a flush of something like the old rapturous delight. His joy, and tenderness, and fear, melted her reserve, and this new meeting was the happiest moment of their brief and troubled wedded life.

"We may still be happy," she murmured, caressing his head as he knelt beside her. "Let us make the best of life, Val. Let us be apart no more."

"We will not part again," said Val, with tears in his eyes, "until death parts us."

"Hush!" she answered, laying a hand upon his lips. "Do not talk of that, Val."

He was constant in his attendance upon her, and found her more than commonly full of those forebodings and presentiments which are common to women in her situation. He did not even know that they were common; and though he fought against them, and smiled them down in her presence, they weighed upon him heavily, and he had a horrible fear that they would be fulfilled. If she would have permitted it, he would have had every physician in the city in attendance upon her; though, with a touch of British prejudice, he despised them all, and would have had more confidence in an English medical student freshly dressed in the glories of a diploma. It chanced that a young English surgeon of great promise, though as yet of inconsiderable note, was at that time in Naples, whither he had accompanied, all the way from England, an elderly aristocrat, who had chosen to think himself ill, and now preferred to think himself cured of a complaint which had never ailed him. But the noble feeble Earl so enthusiastically cried the praise of his *medico*, in whose society he had chosen to cast off his fancied malady, that Val, hearing of him, eagerly got a letter of introduction to my lord, and from him an introduction to the young doctor. The doctor wanted to return to England, and was well pleased to find employment on the way. Val had a great desire that his child should be born at home, and Constance shared it. The doctor gave it as his opinion that she would do best to travel by sea, and if possible, by short stages. So they

sailed for Marseilles, and lingered there a day or two, and then found a vessel bound for Cadiz, and sailed thither in exquisite summer weather, with scarce a heave upon the sea. Little Mary accompanied them, of course. She had written many letters to Hiram, bewailing her own wickedness, and giving her own small impressions of foreign parts. Hiram had responded in clerkly hand and periods rhetorical. When Hiram set pen to paper, he lost all the raciness characteristic of his speech, and modeled himself apparently on the dullest of newspaper leaders. "I will not," he wrote, with most judicial and unloverlike gravity, "attempt to add to the weight of your contrition by reproaching you for the part you have played in this lamentable tragedy. But I am attached by ties, which I will not pause to catalogue, to Mr. Gerard Lumby, and I will not leave him until the wounds he has endured are cicatrized by time. You will see, therefore, that your own conduct holds us apart for an indefinite period."

At first the very English of his epistle crushed its recipient. But it was so unlike Hiram that she believed in her inmost heart that its severity was assumed; and this conviction, strengthened by desire, held her poor little heart alive. Like wiser people, she believed what was pleasant to believe; but in this matter she had the truth at least partly on her side. In Hiram's eyes she had done wrong; but he had heard the argument by which she had been persuaded, and he knew something of the struggle she had gone through. And he was, besides, one of those misguided people who have a mighty idea of the supremacy of the male creature in marriage; and, like a good many others, he could be amazingly resolute—on paper. Of late Hiram's letters had almost ceased; but she knew that he too was in foreign parts; and even that, though she could not hope to meet him, seemed vaguely to bring him nearer. She was immensely attached to Constance, who treated her with unvarying kindness; and, altogether, she was perhaps the least unhappy of the quintet whom the runaway match affected.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"AY!" CRIED GARLING IN A QUAVERING VOICE, "YOU HAVE PUNISHED ME ENOUGH AMONGST YOU."

HAVING once decided in her traveled mind that foreign cities were not only unlike London, but exceedingly unlike each other, Mary was steeled against the surprises of costume, architecture, and physiognomy. But that she shared the common frailty, and was not steeled against the amazement of meeting what used to be common in the midst of so much uncommonness, was fairly proved by the fact that suddenly encountering Hiram Search in a shady street in Cadiz, she sat upon a convenient door-step and fainted. Hiram himself, though much amazed by the encounter, was less affected, and seizing a passing water-carrier, borrowed his little tin vessel, and knelt above his sweetheart and laved her temples, and her lips until she recovered. He had pictured to himself another meeting, and had all ready for delivery an impressive discourse calculated for her moral benefit; but now, when she came round, he was nursing her head upon his breast and murmuring, "My poor darlin', my poor darlin'," and taking not the slightest notice of half a dozen ugly but picturesque old women, and one picturesque and astonishingly pretty young one, who suddenly found this little drama acting beneath their noses, and stood attentively to watch it through. Mary was much more sensitive to public observation than her lover. The first thing she did was to arrange her bonnet and lower her veil, the next to resume her seat upon the convenient door-step and cry comfortably. Hiram addressed the assembled ladies in their own language, and begged them to disperse; but being unable to prevail upon them, he lifted Mary to her feet, tucked her arm under his, and marched off with her.

"Mrs. Strange is in Cadiz, I suppose?" asked Hiram.

"Yes," answered Mary; "and Mr. Strange. They are going home to their house at Brierham."

Hiram's reception of this simple piece of news astonished Mary; but it meant so much to him that she could not

understand. He resolved at once to keep a hawk's eye on his master.

"You have been very angry with me, Hiram," said Mary, attacking the subject next her heart; "but you will forgive me, won't you?" Somehow, Hiram's sternness had dissolved, and he forgave her, without the lecture he had intended to deliver; and she began to bubble over with innocent happiness and gayety, and to talk of her curiosities of modern travel, all grown remarkable again, now that Hiram was here to listen whilst she spoke of them. He allowed her to run on, and threw in here and there a question to direct her talk, so that, without alarming her by any inkling of his own fears, he drew from her a contradiction of them. Gerard had touched neither at Naples nor Marseilles, and could, therefore, not be here of malice aforethought, since he had no knowledge of his enemy's journey. And just as this dread was finally lifted from Hiram's mind, Mary stopped, and clasping his arm with both hands, made as if to hide herself behind him, whilst with frightened eyes she stared across the street. Following the direction of her glance, he was aware of his master, standing stock-still with folded arms, unconscious of their presence, but tracking with eyes that burned like fire another figure in their rear, which, as they halted, approached them, leaning heavily on a walking-stick, and moving with a dejected head and downward glance. The face of this bent and ancient-looking figure was hidden from Hiram, though visible to Gerard. The latter crossing the sunny pavement, stepped into shadow within two yards of Hiram, so absorbed in his contemplation of the bent figure that he had no eyes for his servant. When the man tottered and quavered quite close, Gerard gripped him by the shoulder, and the pinched old face whose hollow care-worn eyes looked up at him was the face of Garling. Hiram fell back a step with an exclamation which drew his master's regard upon him. Garling's glance traveled from one to another, with an uneasy half-apprehension of their presence. His own daughter; the man who had ruined his plans; and the son of the man he had plotted to ruin. He murmured that they had not often looked so real, and made as if to pass on; but Gerard's grasp detained him.

"So you are here, Mr. Garling, are you?" asked Gerard, swaying the quavering old figure gently to and fro in his

strong hand. "*Your* villainy hasn't led to happiness, either?" That truth was written in his face.

"That's new," said Garling, turning his head aside as if to listen. "They say the same things over and over again. A trick—a mere trick, to trap me into weakness and confession."

"Mister," said Hiram, "he's as mad as a March hare!"

The old man's eyes shifted to the last speaker, with a new look in them, half dreadful, half inquiring. Then they wandered to his daughter's face. "Why don't *you* speak?" he asked.

She shrunk away from him. "Hiram," she said falteringly, "he frightens me. Take me away."

"You can't hold malice against a thing like this?" said Hiram, addressing his master.

"Malice?" replied Gerard, dropping the hand that had held Garling. "No."

"Ay!" cried Garling, in a quavering voice, "you have punished me enough, amongst you! But you were gentle when the rest were hard. Perhaps you guessed I meant to use you kindly after all." This was to Mary, who shrunk back from him appalled. "Ay, you're afraid of me; but I meant well by you. And I mean well by you still. It isn't much, compared with what it might have been, but it is all honestly come by, and that's a great matter—a great matter. Make a good use of it."

The three who heard him looked from one to the other, and little Mary, whose nerves had already been greatly shaken, began to cry again.

"Why, now you weep," he said, "and I perceive you feel some touch of pity. Ah, that's Shakespeare! I was a great student of Shakespeare when I was a lad. A man of lofty imagination, and versed in all the mysteries of human nature. Cæsar haunted Brutus. But no man was ever so crowded round with ghosts as I have been."

It was evident alike to Gerard and to Hiram that he was not sure of their corporeal unreality, but they could each trace the meaning beneath these scattered words of his.

"You don't take me for a ghost, do you, mister?" said Hiram.

Garling looked startled and perplexed, and made as if to go on again, but turning, caught sight of Mary, and laid

his hand on her gently. "Don't go," he whispered; "don't leave me. I shall make it worth your while."

"Heaven's my witness, mister," said Hiram earnestly to Gerard, "that I don't want my little gell to finger a penny of his money, if he's got any; but it ain't the thing to leave him in this condition in a foreign city. He's been a rare bad old lot, and that's a fact; but he ought to be looked after."

Gerard returning no answer, Hiram laid his hand on Garling's shoulder and addressed him in Spanish. "Do you speak the language, old man! Can you get on by yourself?"

"Yes, yes," returned Garling, putting him fretfully aside, and striving once more to get past Hiram to his daughter, who, with terror in every gesture and feature, avoided him.

"Take her away," said Gerard. "I will see that he does not follow you. I can get somebody to take charge of him, I dare say. You needn't be afraid of me, Search," he said, somewhat bitterly. "Heaven has taken vengeance *here.*"

"That's like yourself," returned Hiram. "That's the first thing like you sence we sailed out of Thames river!"

"Take her away," said Gerard, again, speaking sternly this time. Hiram obeyed.

The old man struggled to pursue the retreating pair; but Gerard, passing an arm through Garling's, turned round, and led him in the way he had been originally going. He resented this for a moment only, and then, with drooping eyes, submitted.

"Where do you live?" asked Gerard.

Garling raised his stick a little from the ground and pointed forward. He went on slowly but without hesitation; and before they had gone far, he paused, and drawing a key from his pocket, entered at an open door-way, mounted a set of white stone steps, and admitted himself to a large chamber, furnished in the fashion of the country, which always looks sparse to an English eye, but with no sign of poverty or neglect in its appearance.

"Is this your home?" Gerard demanded softly.

Garling laid down his hat and stick and passed a hand across his forehead before answering. When he responded, it was with a tone and manner so different from those he had hitherto employed, that the questioner was startled.

"This is my home, Mr. Lumby, and will be for the remainder of my time." He motioned his visitor to a seat, and himself sunk down wearily. "I can not resent your intrusion," he said feebly; "and since you have found me here, you may tell my late employers that I am a good deal worn, and that I shall not last much longer. I have had many troubles lately, Mr. Gerard, and my mind is affected; I feel it unhinged at times. I was proud of my intellect many years ago, and I misused it. I am broken down, as you may know by these confessions; shattered, quite shattered, and an old man." The light alternately flickered and faded on his face, and his voice seemed to fall and rise with the brightening and the dying of an inward gleam. At one second his face and voice looked and sounded altogether sane, and in the next both had grown senile. The words "I am broken down" were maundering: "as you may know by these confessions" followed swiftly, with a reassertion of his ancient self: "shattered, quite shattered; an old man," might have been spoken by one hopelessly gone into melancholia.

"The evil you attempted to do us, failed or partly failed," said Gerard. He might have gone on to say more; but Garling broke in with a murmur: "Failed? Yes, yes. It failed." Then they both sat silent for a time, until Garling looked up with a bewildered air. "Help me," he said; "I want to think of something. Whom did I meet? Have I met anybody to-day?"

"Your daughter?" asked Gerard.

"Yes," he said, brightening instantly, but sinking back again. By and by he said, in the old dry reticent way which the listener could remember from his boyhood: "It is a curious thing for me to ask a favor of any man belonging to your house. Will you do me one?"

"If I can," said Gerard. "Yes."

"There is some remnant of my own money left me, and I wish my daughter to inherit it. I have not command of myself at all times, and my mind is shattered. It is going. What did I want to say?"

"Listen to me," said Gerard, as he drooped again. "You wish to make a will in your daughter's favor?"

"Yes, yes."

"Entirely and without reserve?" He nodded "Yes"

again, with brightening eyes. "And you wish me to have it prepared and bring it to you to sign?"

"Yes," he said, once more collected; "and to make immediate provision for the transfer of my last penny to an English bank." He arose and produced papers, and gave instructions dryly and clearly, without even a verbal stumble. "If you bring a lawyer with you," he said then, "see me before you bring him, and let him meet me at my best."

Gerard promised this also; and Garling again began to maunder in his speech: and after a time the young fellow left him, bound by his undertaking, but not sure that the broken swindler would ever again be in a mental condition to make any business transaction valid. He did perhaps the wisest thing he could do, and consulted the British consul, to whom he told the whole story. The consul himself drafted Garling's last testament, and he and Gerard witnessed the document when it was signed. When called upon for his signature, Garling was in the full possession of his motive powers. The man's tremendous will was equal to the strain he made upon it; but it never answered to another call; and in a week his stubborn wasted heart beat its last, and the ghosts his wicked life had gathered round him haunted him no more.

CHAPTER XLV.

"CONSTANCE! MAY BE GOD WILL BE GOOD, AND LET ME SEE YOU HAPPY, AS YOU NEVER COULD HAVE BEEN IN THIS WORLD."

DAYS before Garling's death, Constance and Val had left Cadiz on their homeward route, and Mary had traveled with them in attendance upon her mistress. Constance had written to her aunt Lucretia, telling her of the new hopes and fears which dwelt about her, and entreating a renewal of her old friendship. The old lady came down, in answer to this letter, to meet her at Southampton, and received her very kindly; but she encountered her ancient favorite Val Strange with inexplicable and inflexible enmity. "Don't tell me, my dear," she said in answer to her niece's remonstrances; "he left you alone at the be-

ginning of your sufferings. I know it all. Everybody has talked about it. He was a faithless friend, to begin with, and he's a bad husband; and I will never speak to him again."

"He is not a bad husband," Constance answered, weeping. "We have had cause for trouble, and we have been unhappy, but never, never, through any want of love on either side! And dear aunt, help us to be happy now. We shall have cause to be happy now."

Aunt Lucretia wept with her, and relented partially, for Constance's sake. But against Val she was implacable, and she treated him with a distant coldness which pained him deeply. The elder Mr. Jolly met the little party in town, having constrained himself to leave Paris in honor of the expected event; for which, without anybody precisely knowing why, he seemed to appropriate to himself an amazing credit.

"My dear Valentine," he said, as Val sat moodily over his wine and a cigar, after dinner, on his first night in England, "it has always been my practice to endeavor to make the best of everything. We have proverbs on our side: Love laughs at locksmiths, and All's fair in love and war. And apart from the romantic and sentimental aspect which, to eyes, more youthful than mine, the case may wear, I console myself with the reflection that the marriage is a *fait accompli*. Your proceeding, I presume I may acknowledge without any danger of offense, and certainly without any intention of being offensive, was—er—a little startling. But all that is over; and you are prepared to encounter the commonplace of life, and I presume to stay at home, become *custos rotulorum*, and discharge the duties of a good landlord. I have always maintained that the one claim a father has to consideration in affairs of this kind is that he is interested in his daughter's happiness. I am not without the emotions common to paternity; but I have never been inclined to obtrude my anxieties, and I will not obtrude them now."

Val said "Yes" and "No" and "Of course"—at the right places, for the most part; and Mr. Jolly was absolutely satisfied with him, and with himself. When they all left London, he was established in free quarters in Val's house at Brierham; and he felt a pleasurable glow in the fact that this eligible family mansion was henceforth

his daughter's home, and that in those days when Paris might seem dull to him, he would find a shelter here. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that had Val been poor instead of wealthy, Mr. Jolly's ideas on the moral and sentimental aspect of the elopement might have undergone development in a different direction. Val himself was filled with anxious thoughts; but he too, like Constance, looked for a veritable sacrament of love in the birth of a child. But his emotions were not of that boisterous and thick-skinned quality which can bear to find vent in the presence of strangers; and thus, except in those now rare moments when he and his wife were alone together, he wore rather a morose and preoccupied air. Miss Lucretia set this down to a desire on his part to be away from the place, and charged him in her own heart with a perpetual longing after the flesh-pots of a bachelor's Egypt. Not all Constance's faith in her husband's affection, nor Val's own constant presence in the house, could weaken this belief of hers. Women can be amazingly cruel on occasion, and the old maiden lady relented not to Val. He bore everything with patience, even with seeming apathy, strengthened inwardly by new hopes, and chastened by fears new and old.

In the midst of all this, news reached him that General Lumby had returned, and had again taken up his residence at Lumby Hall. Before Constance had recalled him to her side, he had fallen into such a mood that he would not greatly have cared had he been called upon to expiate his falsity to friendship with his life. But now he had a reason for living, and he meant to live. He listened anxiously for tidings of Gerard and his manner of living; and such small items of news as reached him were reassuring. The defeated rival seemed at length to have settled down, accepting his defeat. Val had no wish to remember against him that wild night in the Mediterranean. He knew he had given horrible provocation; and he even looked to his own devotion to Constance as one means of appeasing Gerard's hatred. He laid plans for the future, and resolved, if things went well with him, that he would migrate to another county. He did himself more justice when he admitted that Gerard would find it unpleasant to have him for a constant neighbor; and since it seemed well that one of them should move to a distance, it seemed well

that he should be the emigrant. He had robbed Gerard of enough already. He would not rob him of the house in which his ancestors had lived so long, by poisoning the air about it.

Let me say once more that Val Strange was not meant by nature to live disloyally. But fate is just, and his very virtues tore him.

Gerard in Cadiz had asked Hiram one question: "Is *she* here?" Mary's unlooked for presence had dictated this inquiry.

"She is," Hiram had responded. "She's goin' to England, and her husband's with her." Gerard started, and paled ever so little; but Hiram watched him with glittering eyes which missed nothing. "They're going home for a special purpose. I reckon if it turns out a son, that when he's grown up, he'd like to feel he'd been born in the ancestral halls. Anyhow," added Hiram, "I guess I should if I was going to be born over again as a British aristocrat."

Not even Hiram had rightly estimated the purposes which moved Gerard to the reckless and horrible revenge he had once attempted. He was not avenging his own wrongs, but the wrongs done to Constance by her husband's desertion of her. He did not understand, he did not even dream, that the thought of his own sufferings, and their disloyalty to him, had cast the shadow which lay like an impassable barrier between man and wife. To his mind, Val had been doubly a traitor—false to him, and false to the woman he had stolen from him. It was the belief in the second falsity which had stirred him to the contemplation of that crime which it was Hiram's happy fortune to frustrate. It was not likely that Val's return to his old home after so remarkable a disappearance from it, should go untalked of. The general verdict had been unfavorable to him at his going, and it was unfavorable still. Had Miss Lucretia's tongue been less active, it might have been otherwise; for a wealthy, good-looking, good-tempered young fellow, who has the loveliest woman in a county for his wife, is likely to be popular, and to find more serious crimes than a runaway marriage forgiven him. Even the parting at Naples, and Val's extended cruises in the Levant, would have been condoned and forgotten; but it was murmured everywhere that Mrs. Strange's aunt knew the

naughty secret of their parting—that Val was guilty, and that she was implacable. After the lapse of a year from the date of his tragedy, foolish people felt justified in hinting at these things even in Gerard's presence, and the rumors reached him in a hundred ways.

A slow, bitter, awful fire of wrath burned in the young man's heart. By nature and descent, loyal and honest, but by nature and descent disposed to nurse revenge, his native virtue and his native ice of blood alike spurred him to hate his enemy. He said of himself, and it was true, that he would have roasted at a slow fire, rather than have deceived a friend as Val had deceived him. His own purity of honor made Val's dishonor all the viler. Yet even then, had Val continued true to Constance, and had she seemed happy with him, there was enough of heathen valor in the man to have hidden hatred and heart-burning for a lifetime. But now, to his distorted gaze, Revenge stood consecrated by Hate and Scorn. He could leave Garling to the vengeance, or even the mercy of heaven, without an inward struggle. But Garling had not sought to rob him of his love; and Garling had missed his own prize, and had grown old on a sudden, and was near death's door, and had but a tottering reason left him; whereas this supreme criminal had succeeded in his crime, and having stolen his treasure, had thrown it away. We know how false the popular talk was; but he did not. It found ready credence with him, and there was no baseness, however unexampled, of which he was not ready to believe that Val Strange had been or would be guilty.

But he, like the rest of us, was led by a way he knew not.

As the hoped-for yet dreaded time grew nearer in the house at Brierham, Val and Constance grew nearer to each other in confidence and affection. They looked forward, though with certain tremblings and forebodings, to a happy and united life. The child would lay a hand on each, and would hold them together to all times. But Val knew nothing of the county talk, and his moody troubled face bore no disguise that the dull wits of visitors and servants could be expected to look through.

The weather for many days past had been close and sultry, and had brought with it a feeling of depression, which affected both husband and wife. And now the time fraught with so much of desire and dread came on, and

Val waited for news in the room in which Hiram Search first met him. For a time the messengers who found him waiting there, brought reassuring news enough; but in a while he was left altogether alone, staring out at the sultry noonday sky and the shadowless noonday fields. He waited a long time, and then rang the bell and asked for news. The messenger returned with an ominous face and an equivocal message; and after another anxious terrible pause of an hour, which seemed a year in its prolonged suspense, he was confronted by the doctor. "Well?" he said. That was all. It was recorded against him afterward, though the stern, almost savage brevity of the question meant Love on the rack.

"I may congratulate you on one side, Mr. Strange," returned the doctor; "though on the other I am afraid there is scarcely room for hope." Val looked at him stonily and said nothing. It was all set down against him with the rest, though his very heart-strings ached. "Mrs. Strange has implored me to allow her to see you. I am sure I need not ask you to be self-possessed, though I fear it can make little difference."

There was a dryness in his throat and a fire in his eyes, as Val followed the doctor through the long corridor and up the stairs. A moment later, Constance reached feeble arms toward him.

"You have always loved me," she whispered, "in spite of the shadow that fell between us."

"Always," he answered huskily. "I shall love you till I die." He buried his piteous face in the pillow beside her, and those were the last words she heard in this world. The lax arm that lay across his neck told him the truth; but he did not move until some one entered and touched him on the shoulder. Then he arose and looked at the face before him for a minute, and walked away without a tear or a kiss or a murmur. It told against him in the common foolish tale; but in his soul lay the unutterable burden of coming hopeless years, and whatever broken gleam of light the world had held for him seemed at that moment to go out—forever.

The doctor left the house of mourning, and was called to another case. He carried the news with him; and before it was two hours old, Gerard Lumby heard it. He had shown grief once, and was on his guard now, and his

Spartan heart carried him away alone to the rocky slope of Welbeck Head. To die loveless—the woman he had loved. If the man had loved her and been faithful to her, he could have borne to see her happy. As he thought this, and grief and hatred inextinguishable tore his heart, he sat upon a gray bowlder, so still that he might have seemed a statue, in spite of the storm within. And behind him a pall as black as Death climbed up the western heaven, and blotted out the sun, and touched the zenith, and spread out and down until it draped the sky from west to east and from north to south. There was no sign of wind; but the vast sheet of cloud crept onward as if by its own volition, throwing forward great ragged feelers of the color of red-hot copper. By and by this hue, as of heated metal, spread over all the doleful under-sky, and the face of the heavens was livid, as though some gigantic fury were held back there by the strong spirit of a god. Then, without further warning, before one drop of rain had fallen, or one sigh of wind had spoken to the ear, a flash of lightning fell, and close upon it came a roar so near, so sudden and so terrible, that he leaped to his feet, and whilst it lasted felt his own passions stricken deaf and dumb and blind. The rain lashed him like a whip, and the wind released, swept out of the western darkness with gusts against which he felt it difficult to stand. The lightning and the thunder seemed one, they came so close together; and the echoes of the first tremendous peal were still buffeting windily from rock to rock, when another came upon them, and smote their mockeries dead with overwhelming sound; and again the ferocious echoing laughter of the hills broke out, and again the thunder slew it, and again it rose, till the clamor seemed scarcely less of earth than heaven. And amidst all this, his passions rose from stupor, and leaped to madness, and for once in a life the forces of nature seemed strained to find voice for a human soul.

As he stood thus, resigned in unmeasured inward tempest to the storm, he saw on a sudden that he was not alone upon the headland; and in the next flash that split the gloom and held the landscape quivering whilst he might have counted three, he knew the figure of the man he hated. Val Strange was there, scarce fifty yards away, flying upward along the broken path. Not knowing why he followed, Gerard sprung after him. It was as yet no

more than evening; but the storm had cast a shadow which anticipated night, and the lightning was needed to show the way. In the deep gloom which followed every flash, he lost the flying figure; but with each succeeding flash it seemed cast out of night again, no nearer and no further than before. Strain as he would, he could not decrease the distance which separated them by a single yard. He never paused in the intensity in which every fiber of soul and body was set upon the chase, to think of a reason for his enemy's presence there. There was no thought within him apart from those the tempest spoke for him of madness and revenge. When he fell, as he did often, he felt no shock or pain. The storm gave the sole counsel he heeded, and seemed to lift him on its wing, and yet with equal power to guide the other's footsteps.

Tempest-borne, pursuer and pursued fled upward. They were far past the Hollow which lay below them on the right of their course, and from the first till now they had taken a precipitate road, a mere sheep-track, shunned by the feet of men. The subtle fluid showed the broad, bare shoulder of the headland, and they were within three hundred yards of the sheer edge. Here for a second the hunted figure paused, and Gerard seeing this paused also. In that second, he knew his purpose for the first time, and consciously surveyed it. Though they fell together, he would cast this villain over the precipice. He kept his eyes on the spot where he had last seen his quarry, until the lightning cast him out of the dark again, and then he saw that he was moving slowly onward. Gerard followed slowly, and they kept their distance still. And now the storm began to decrease in violence, and as he reached the summit of the Head, the pursuer saw that all along the western sea-line there was a yellow gleam of light, and that the clouds had broken there in scattered rags of purple, which trailed over a sky of tarnished gold. He saw, too, that this rift of gold was growing larger, and that in a little while the storm would cease almost as suddenly as it had fallen. Here, on the bare scalp of the headland, there was a grewsome twilight cast from the breach in the western clouds, and the lightning showed paler in it than it had done below, against the darkness of the higher skies.

He saw these things as one who did not see them, and all his thought was of the man ahead and how to stalk

him. To go on at a rush might be fatal to his purpose; for he knew, from many a trial in boyhood and youth, that Val Strange was fleeter of foot than he, and could outdistance and outlast him. So, with a cold deadliness of intent, as absorbing as the heat and passion of pursuit had been, he chose his ground and crept from bowlder to bowlder, nearer and nearer. The rain had ceased to fall, and only now and again the lightning hung out its shuddering flame. The thunder rumbled miles and miles behind. The slower pace, the caution of the trail, and the cessation of the tempest, seemed to fit his mood anew, as completely as the wild chase and the tumult within had kept the tumult without in unison. He was within half a score of yards now from his quarry, and he crawled a little forward and coiled himself for a spring, when a wild voice broke on the late-born stillness.

"Good-bye, all!" it cried. "Good-bye to the world I did the devil's work in. Good-bye to the trusting friend I stabbed to the heart. God bless him. Oh, Gerard, Gerard! And oh, my love, my love!" and the wild voice quivered down into sobs and murmured on brokenly: "And the little baby four hours old. Good-bye. You won't know how your father died. They won't think the cold-hearted villain who played his friend so false, had the heart to die like this; or the heart to break as mine is broken. Constance! may be God will be good, and let me see you happy as you never could have been in this world." The voice pealed out again madly: "Good-bye—good-bye—good-bye, all!" and a staggering step scattered the loose pebbles. Not six yards from the edge of the precipice lay a murderous figure coiled for a spring, and when the next staggering step came on, the spring was made. The suicide was caught in a grip of steel, and a voice cried out: "Not that way, Val! Not that way!" And they were weeping wildly in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"HIRAM," SHE SAID DEJECTEDLY, "ARENT'T YOU GOING TO KISS ME?"

THAT a girl with five thousand pounds to her fortune should be a lady's-maid any longer was of course downright ridiculous even in fancy. Even if Constance had lived,

Mary's position would have been anomalous, and to seek a new post now was out of the question. So, with her five thousand pounds at the banker's in London, she provided herself with store of raiment, and took lodgings with a highly respectable old lady at Brierham, and waited with patience for Hiram to come and marry her. But a check-book is hardly what Hibernicus calls the height of good company, and she felt as lonely and as unprotected, and almost as exposed to the ills of life, as in her days of poverty.

She waited with patience, and no Hiram came; she waited with impatience, and no Hiram came; she took to tears, and still he stayed away. And so, one day in the close of August, with much trembling and fear, she took a car, and was driven to the gates of Lumby Hall. She waited there, and sent the driver with instructions to ask for Mr. Search, and to tell him that Miss Martial desired to speak to him. Now, in a little country town like Brierham, "a'body kens a'body," and everybody's business is everybody else's business. Mary was an heiress and a person of note, and even the local gentlefolks took an interest in her fate, and gossiped about her over their tea-tables. It was almost universally settled that to marry a valet would be the height or depth of folly, though everybody expected that the lately favored lover would be pretty urgent in advancing his claim. So, when it was known that she had received no visits, and had not stirred abroad, and had not indeed received so much as a note from anybody but Mr. Valentine Strange and her lawyers, it was concluded that the lover was dismissed.

The relation of this history has sometimes made the mention of large sums compulsory, and King Crœsus himself could not treat millions with greater *sang-froid* than the present writer. But I am not steeled by this familiarity with vast fortunes against a sense of the manifold values of even so small a fortune as five thousand pounds. "Imagine, then, how glorious it glowed"—this snug little shining heap of money, in the eyes of certain unattached small gentry of the borough. At an interest of five per cent. that snug little shining heap would yield an unappreciable fraction over four pounds sixteen shillings and a penny-three-farthings per week for every week of the fifty-two in a year, the principal remaining untouched—a metallic goose which could go on laying his hebdomadal

golden egg forever. The chief butcher of the place—for not alone were the smaller gentry interested—was a rosy-faced, red-whiskered young bachelor who did a great trade, and sometimes rode to hounds, when even the swells of the meet would nod and say: "How d'ye do, Banister?" Now he looked on that little fortune in the lump, and had visions of plate-glass in the upstairs windows, and a new slaughter-house. The corn-chandler, who was a bachelor also, turned it over in his mind, and saw a new frontage for his High Street premises. Captain Staggers, who boasted himself a cadet of the house of Windgall—the Earl of Windgall's seat, as all the world knows, is Shouldershott Castle, in the north—Captain Staggers, who once held a commission in the county militia, and whose title stuck to him, seedy and shaky and disreputable as he was, saw, when he thought of that snug little sum, a perfect vista of bar-maids serving drinks to a perfect vista of rehabilitated Captain Staggerses. Mr. Quill, the lately imported Irish solicitor, saw a larger house; and his mother, Mrs. Croke, a second time widowed, had a beatific vision of new window curtains and an Axminster carpet.

Little Mary, unwitting of these fancies, sat in the car, drawn a little off the road in the shade, and waited for Hiram Search. The driver, though he was a discreet man, and by not so much as a wink betrayed himself, knew all about it, and had the clearest understanding of the situation. Returning after an absence of ten minutes, he stated that Hiram would follow by and by; and hinting in a conversational manner that the day was dry, that in the coming interview it "ud be awkward to have a fool like him a-lookin' on," and that there was a public-house three hundred yards away, he received a gratuitous sixpence, and departed. Mary stood up in the car, and craned her neck to make observation of the carriage-drive, and in a little while saw Hiram, with his long legs striding out like the legs of a pair of compasses. At that spectacle her courage all deserted her, and she descended from the vehicle, and hiding herself behind the body of it, waited with palpitating bosom. Hiram came, looked about him, saw the car, and the fluttering dress behind it, and walked straight to where she stood.

"Now," he said, "I take this kind of you—I take it very kind."

"Hiram!" said little Mary, looking up at him appealingly, with one outstretched hand set toward him. He took the hand and shook it gravely, repeating that he took it very kind of her. "Hiram," she said dejectedly, "aren't you going to kiss me?" Her lips pouted and trembled a little, like cherries that kiss each other on a shaken branch.

"Cert'nly!" said Hiram, and did it with solemn alacrity.

"Why don't you meet me as you used to?" she asked tremulously.

"Wal, my pretty," said Hiram, "in the words of the immortal bard, Scotland stands not wheer it did."

"I don't know what you mean," she answered, with an air of assumed disdain. "You're not true-hearted, Hiram."

"Mebbe I ain't," said the accused; "but I fancy I am."

"Then," said she with irresistible logic, "why didn't you put your arm round my waist?"

"My dear," said Hiram, serpentining his long arm about her, "I'd always rather be asked into a man's house than be kicked out of it. I take this very kind of you, and very loyal an' true-hearted, my little dear." He looked down at her with his queer sallow face beaming. "You ain't sp'iled by fortune," he said. "Are you?"

"Hiram!" cried Mary again, and made an indignant pretense of tearing herself away from him. "How could you think it of me?"

"I didn't," said Hiram. "Look at me. Is this here cheek of mine grown pale with care? Is my beamin' eye grown dim with hidden tears? Is there any sign in my hull anatomy of the gnawin' of the canker-worm? No, my dear. I ain't been fretting, not an atom. I've just been waiting for you to come, and say: 'Hiram, your pretty loving little gal ain't changed.' And now you come and say it, don't you?" She said she did; and indeed, as she nestled to him and gazed up at him, it looked as if she meant it. "That's all right," pursued Hiram. "Don't you see now, I couldn't come to you and say: 'You took me when you was poor, and you'll have to stick to me now you're wealthy.' I couldn't even seem to mean that. I won't say you'd have broke my heart, if you hadn't come. My heart's a tolerable tough old muscle, and it'd take a deal of breakin'. I wouldn't say it wouldn't have ached.

I think it would; but there's a margin between achin' and breakin', ain't there?'' Mary supposed so, laughing at his quaintly serious face, and holding his gaunt hand in both hers. "But now," resumed Hiram, "there's no such thing as a clean hank as'll run five minutes without raveling in this world, is there? And we've got trouble in front of us."

"Trouble?" she repeated. "What should trouble us?"

"Don't you be scared," said Hiram. "Nothing much. But you can see I'm bound to the boss for awhile to come, anyhow. Now, it stands to nature you want to get married, and so do I. And it stands to reason that a young lady with a fortune can't have her husband acting in my present capacity. In any other man's service I should feel the present capacity mean. I own up to that; I should feel it a derogation from any American citizen's privileges and proper feelings. But not with Gerard Lumby, Esquire. No. Well now, you see, I don't want to scratch a sore place, but he's had a great deal of trouble, and I am kind of sorry for him and attached to him. He's got used to me, just as you have, my dear; and if I went away just now, he'd miss me. He's mending. I can't make it out; but from the night Mrs. Strange died, he's that changed I hardly know him."

"How is he changed?" asked Mary, speaking rather because Hiram paused than for any other reason. She could not blame Hiram's unselfish devotion; but you may be sure that she looked forward to the waiting it promised with no great rejoicing.

"He used to be just as hard and cold," said Hiram, "as a frozen anvil. He wa'n't like a man after you three went away together. And now he's as sweet and mild with everybody as a roarin' democrat receivin' a British Prince. He's sad sometimes—that mournful, it'd melt the innards of a Bengal tiger only to look at him. But it ain't the same kind o' sadness; and, him and Valentine Strange was arm in arm walking up and down this road two mortal hours the day afore yesterday." He paused after that statement, as if he expected to be told that it was incredible. Mary received it with an astonishment which justified his expectation.

"Arm in arm!" she said. "Mr. Strange and Mr. Lumby! Mr. Gerard?"

"Arm in arm," he said. "And looking as friendly as a pair of rival actors. Only it was plain they meant the friendliness, and the rival actors pretty gen'ally don't."

At this moment, a step sounded in the lane, and Mary, escaping from his arm, peeped round the corner of the moss-grown wall. "The driver's coming back," she whispered.

"Kiss me quick, my honey!" said Hiram. "I shall see you soon. Likely as not, drop in and ask you for a cup of tea this evenin'."

The driver appeared; and Mary, with a final shake-hands, as if no tenderer farewell had just been taken, entered the car. Hiram, with might gravity of demeanor, watched her driven away, walked back along the graveled drive, entered the house, and marched straight into the presence of his master.

"Well, Search," said Gerard, "what is it?"

"Can you spare me this afternoon and evenin'?" Hiram asked.

"Yes," said Gerard, looking up from a book which lay on the table before him. "Search," he said suddenly, and with a little smile, "I have been neglecting your affairs very sadly. Are you going to Brierham?"

Here, for the first and last time in this narrative, let it be recorded that Hiram blushed. "I am," he said, defensively.

"Of course you are. Why haven't you gone before?"

"Well," said Hiram, "there was reasons, good reasons."

"No trouble, I hope?" said Gerard.

"None in the world," said Hiram.

"When do you think of getting married?" asked Gerard. "I suppose I shall lose you soon?"

"No; you won't," said Hiram. "We ain't in any hurry."

"Very well," said Gerard quietly. "She's living with old Mrs. Norton, I think—isn't she, in Brierham High Street? Ah, I thought so. Will you tell somebody to saddle Roland and bring him round? I sha'n't want you again to-day."

"Thank you," said Hiram, and went away on his errand.

"No train for two hours," said Gerard to himself with a sad little smile. "I can do it in an hour easily."

Ten minutes later, he was at the hall door in attire for the saddle. A groom led Roland round; and the young fellow, mounting, rode away, straight into Brierham town, and dismounting at the hotel, walked across the quiet sunny street and rang at Mrs. Norton's bell. It happened at that moment that Mary was in converse with Mrs. Norton. Your feminine lover seeks a confidante as a duck seeks the water. This, like other generalizations, may be disputed by singular examples; but Mary was not a very exceptional young woman, and Mrs. Norton knew how the land lay; whilst the butcher and the corn-chandler, and the seedy captain and the Irish Quill, and *hoc genus omne*, surveyed it wrongly, and their judgment of its qualities was all awry. At the statement that a gentleman was in the parlor and wished to see her, the old lady bustled down, and was amazed to find Mr. Gerard Lumby standing there.

"Mrs. Norton," said Gerard, shaking hands with her, "how do you do? I am here as a conspirator, and I want you to be another."

"Lawkamussy, Mr. Lumby!" said the old lady, quite flustered.

Gerard explained. "I want to see two people happy, Mrs. Norton. One of them is the young person now residing under your protection, and the other is—" He paused.

"I hope it's the right man, sir," said the old lady, smiling nervously.

"I think it is," said Gerard. "Do you know who the right man is? Very well. If I am wrong, correct me. I think the right man, who is in a position very much below his worth, wants to put off the marriage because he is attached to his employer, and because he thinks his employer can not spare him."

"It's like a dream, your saying so, Mr. Lumby," the old lady cried out. "She's been just telling me them very words upstairs."

"Very well, Mrs. Norton," said Gerard. "I thought it was so, and I wanted to be sure of it."

"She's a dear nice girl," said Mrs. Norton, doubtfully. "Do you think, sir, as he's worthy of her?"

"My dear lady," said Gerard, "Mr. Search is a pearl among men. The woman who marries him is to be envied,

if she has only the sense to know his value. And whatever you may think of his position, he is just as well-to-do as she is. But I forgot. That's a secret. Don't say a word about it till they're married." So he shook hands, and rode away again, leaving the old lady almost bursting with her secret.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"MISTER," SAID HIRAM, COLDLY, "THIS TAKES THE SHINE OFF EVERYTHING."

In an hour's time or thereabouts Mr. Search arrived, in a frock-coat, tightly bottoned, a slim, tall hat, and very accurately fitting boots and gloves. His solemnity and dignity were tremendous. The solemnity remained until he took his leave—the dignity vanished when he crossed the threshold and had once shaken the hostess's hand, and nothing remained of it but that serious cordialness and beautiful sincerity that mark the good American.

In the course of the evening Mr. Search was somehow beguiled into a narration of certain of his experiences of the world and of men and manners. Little Mary sat and worshiped him, and the old lady was filled with wonder and admiration. It appeared that he had been pretty nearly everywhere, and seen pretty nearly everything, to the limited experience of his listeners. Mrs. Norton confessed him a remarkable man, and was known to say of him afterward that he spoke English beautifully. It would seem that she regarded it as being a tongue originally foreign to him. Hiram left early, since he had a two mile walk from the railway station, and reaching the Hall, found his employer waiting for him.

"Search," said Gerard, "I want to speak to you." Hiram stood quietly before him; but Gerard rose and began to pace the room with unequal steps. By and by he paused, and stood straight before Hiram and looked him in the face. "I have it on my mind to say something very serious," he said, deliberately. "It is not very easy to do it. Hiram Search—shake hands." Hiram shook hands, with his gaze fixed on Gerard's. "You and I know from what you saved me. I can never pay you for it; I

shall never want to feel that I have discharged the debt. But will you let me pay you in part?"

They still gripped hands, and looked at each other steadfastly.

"Mister," said Hiram, gravely, "you paid me long ago. You enlisted me with this half-sovereign," touching it with the thumb and finger of his left hand as it hung from his watch-chain. "It wa'n't the gift—it was the way of it. I shall take it kindly if you will never speak of that night again."

"Will you let me try in part to thank you?"

"I'd rather it rested at this," said Hiram. The grip he gave the hand he held at the last word told Gerard all he meant.

"That can't be," said Gerard. "In the first place, we are not going to part, I hope; but you are out of my service from this hour."

"No," said Hiram.

"Yes," insisted Gerard, with a husky laugh, "I discharge you. And now, you true friend and honest man, will you do me the very greatest favor I can ask you? Will you go away and get married and be happy, as you deserve to be, and—" with a hurried shame-facedness which made the gift gracious—"will you take this as a wedding-present from a friend?"

"This" was a strip of paper addressed to a great banking-house in London.

"Mister," said Hiram, coldly, "this takes the shine off everything."

"You can't refuse me," said Gerard. "You'll take it to please me. From a friend, Search—from a friend. And *to* a friend—the best I ever had. Good-night."

He shook Hiram hurriedly by the hand again and left him.

Hiram dug the slip of paper sulkily into his waistcoat pocket, and stood for a moment immersed in unpleasing emotions. "I think it's meaner," he said at last, rousing himself, "to refuse to take it than it would have been not to offer it. I wish there was no such thing as money in the hull wide world. Freezes everything, it does."

But he ended by accepting the gift; and when the natural reluctance he had at first felt was over he experienced a wonderful glow of pride and satisfaction in it. He packed

his traps and left Lumby Hall next day; but before he went old Mr. Lumby sent for him and bade him good-bye and shook hands with him. Hiram's bewilderment at this unexpected proceeding was not allowed to last.

"My son tells me, Mr. Search," the old man said, with quavering dignity, "that you and he have an unusual tie between you, and that you saved him from a great peril by unusual courage and resolution. My son is very dear to me, Mr. Search, and I am grateful to any man who has done him a service."

Mrs. Lumby thanked him also, and Milly gave him a hearty farewell. The women had some guess as to the nature of Hiram's service, though even they were miles away from comprehending the real value of it; but Gerard's father had no suspicion.

The head-groom was a great chum of Hiram's, and pretended business in order to have the fun of a drive with him into Brierham. Their way led them by the road a hungry tramp had traveled once upon a time; and when they reached the brow of a certain little hill Hiram got out and sat upon a certain stone there, and smoked in solemn silence for a time, and then walked on beside the dog-cart to a gate, where he paused again. He took the half sovereign in his hand and looked at it on the spot where it had first come into his possession; and then, with a heart full of quiet thanksiving, he climbed back into the dog-cart and left those scenes behind him.

Nothing less than a marriage by special license would content him, and he and Mary were married by special license accordingly. And when the ceremony was over, by way of wedding-tour, what should the quaint creature do but buy a dog-cart and a noble horse, and drive with his happy little wife along every foot of the ground he had wandered over on his way to London! He told her the whole story. He showed her the public-house where he had learned the art of chair-caning. He even went inside and sat upon one of the chairs his hands had caned, and drank a glass of ale so seated; and the landlord, not knowing him from Adam, was mightily obsequious to him. And I do not think there was ever a happier wedding-tour than that simple journey afforded. The September lanes were lovely all the way, and the wedded pair had splendid weather. They drove right into London, and Hiram drank

a bottle of champagne with that official of the omnibus company who had engaged him and discharged him; and dined regally with his wife at the restaurant where he had served as waiter; and paid a pious pilgrimage to the house where he had first met Mary.

Then, after a month amid the gayeties of the capital, he sold the horse and the dog-cart and went down to Brierham; and on the outskirts of the little town he bought a cottage, and there lived in peace and plenty and homely contentment, not spending more than half his income.

At this date he is the father of a boy whose name is Gerard, and whose godfather is no less a person than the master of Lumby Hall. Hiram himself is an ardent politician, and is counted a safe draw at any political meeting. He fought the last general election with great valor in behalf of a Radical candidate against Mr. Valentine Strange, who secured a seat in spite of him. His invective against the policy of Lord Beaconsfield is said to have been remarkably vivid, and many of the leaders of the "Brierham Morning Star" at that stirring period were believed to have been inspired by him.

Good-bye, Hiram! Rugged, gentle, generous, brave, farewell! Ill as I have drawn you, you may stand as a type, which has been limned better many a time by abler hands, of the manhood of the West—independent, valorous, and kindly; racy of the virtues of freedom; without fear and without reproach.

Mr. Jolly bore his daughter's death with that Spartan fortitude which belongs to the great race of egotists. I will not say he did not grieve; but he talked too much of his bereavement for my simple fancy, and managed his handkerchief too artistically as he stood beside the grave. There is a sort of man who will mountebank grief at a funeral, as he will mountebank joy at a wedding, and patriotic indignation at an election meeting, who, if he shed tears, must needs do it with a grace, and dances you an oratorical minuet over the slain in a Roumelian atrocity.

Of one sincerity of regret Mr. Jolly was guilty. His son-in-law had no filial yearnings toward him, and did not beg him to make his house his home. You meet Mr. Jolly in real life now and then, and I can not conceive of him anywhere as being other than a bore. I fear that sermons are wasted upon him, and that portraiture is a vain art for

him. Meeting his reflection in these pages, he may say—I think I hear him—that it is a most unfaithful and uncharacteristic sketch, and not in the least like anybody.

There are few wounds from which the human heart will not recover, if they are inflicted in its youth. And perhaps the best way of curing such wounds is to leave them to their own healing, and do whatever plain duties lie before you. This was Val Strange's cure, and it succeeded as well as could be hoped. From that wild scene on Welbeck Head he went back to such work as he could find, and then and there left the Primrose Way forever. He has not yet lived down the beliefs his neighbors entertained about the callousness of his conduct toward his young wife and his hardness at her death. And so true are the world's verdicts and so well worth listening to, that Mr. Jolly passes as a model of paternal grief and tender, fatherly remembrance of the dead, while Val is still spoken of as having exhibited himself as a monster of no feeling. It strikes some people as a curious thing that so "dour" and hard a man as Mr. Gerard Lumby was believed to be should ever have overlooked and forgiven the wrong Val Strange did against him. And seeing that the two men, though they meet but seldom, are singularly attached to each other, these wiseacres conclude that Gerard has but a shallow sort of nature after all, and is incapable of any very strong and enduring emotion. But these are mainly people who make a great point of their pretensions to "real character."

Whatever may still be thought of Val's relations with his beautiful wife, there are no mistakes made about his love for his little daughter. He loves her with a haunting, remorseful tenderness, a sad and deep affection; and the common people say that little Constance is the very apple of Squire Strange's eye.

Aunt Lucretia inoculated Reginald only too easily with her own beliefs, and the little man for a long time hated Val with a mingled scorn and loathing which were at times almost too much to bear. But he threw himself, on the other hand, enthusiastically on Gerard's side, and made a hero of him, and, little as he knew, made some near guesses at the sort of storms which had passed through his soul. This intimacy with Gerard cost him dear, and yet gave him a sweet remembrance, which will last his life-

time. He hung about Lumby Hall a good deal in those days, and a singular change was noticed in him.

"I never had any feminine society, Mrs. Lumby," he said on one occasion. "That is, I never enjoyed any lengthened period of home-life, don't you know, madam; and I feel the loss—the deprivation—deeply. Now, it's a fact recognized even by the ancients that female associations soften the manners. I can't say I think a lot of the ancients, as a rule, though they do make such a fuss of them at school and at the 'varsities; but they were certainly right there—don't you think so?"

And so the bald-headed little man fluttered in conversation in a manner altogether new and noticeable. He was nervous—he was hurried and flurried in his speech—and yet he would talk; and was so remarkably eager to be agreeable and complimentary, that he ran some risk of becoming a nuisance.

During one of Reginald's visits to Lumby Hall, two years after his sister's death, Gerard, unexpectedly entering his bedroom, beheld a sight which shook his sides with mirth. We suffer, and we think we shall never laugh more; but the days and the months go by, and the burden of grief is somehow lightened, and then comes a jest somewhere, and we laugh again as heartily as ever. Only, perhaps, the laughter leaves us a little sadder than before, and acts as though it were a signal to call the shadow back again.

Reginald, when Gerard came unexpectedly upon him, was in his shirt-sleeves, and was hard at work with some grewsome, gluey substance out of a bottle, polishing his baldness with both hands, as a French polisher works at mahogany. And there on the table before him was spread each individual device of that great fraternity of quacks who gift the bald with liquid hair-seed at seven-and-six per bottle—a score of them, and nearly all unstoppered. Taking in the whole situation at a glance, Gerard fell against the door-post and lifted up his voice and laughed outrageously. He screamed and neighed and held his sides; and the little man, with his hands still at his head, turned round, and stared at him with a visage so rueful and amazed that mirth became almost heroic in intensity. He smiled feebly at length, and went on polishing, with a look of shame.

"It's all very well to laugh," he said, when Gerard had done laughing, and, in a condition of infantine weakness, was wiping his eyes, "you curled and golden young Anak. But how would you feel if you were a small cove like me, five feet four, and as bald as a billiard-ball? I don't believe any of 'em are of any use," he added, piteously. "And this tack"—indicating the bottle whose contents he had last employed—"is so awfully sticky and sweet, that whenever I use it the flies get at it, and I feel like a catch-'em-alive O."

"Don't!" said Gerard, raising a protesting hand. "I can't stand it!" And suddenly the little man sat down, with his hands well out from his garments, and laughed almost as heroically as Gerard.

"You don't go about in that way, do you?" inquired Gerard, breathlessly, at last.

"No," said the little man. "It's a self-imposed sentence of imprisonment to use it. It's very hard, because a fellow can't even lie down, lest he should stick to something; and besides that, I'd sooner be as I am than bald in spots, as I should be if it made the hair grow, and I had rubbed it off in places. There *is* a dreary sort of interest," he added, "in sitting before a looking-glass and betting with yourself against any special fly making a landing."

Lord Byron has noted the indubitable fact that laughter leaves us doubly serious, but this was a droll introduction to a love-confidence.

"Why do you inflict these miseries upon yourself?" asked Gerard.

"Well, it's unpleasant to know that you're singular," the little man responded. "You feel ostracized from your kind, don't you know?"

"Rubbish!" said Gerard.

"Well, that's nonsense, of course, and was meant for nonsense. But I don't want to look like Methuselah yet, and I get taken for all manner of ages."

"Jolly," said Gerard, "I begin to think you are in love."

He had not the remotest belief that this shaft would hit the white, or he would never have loosed it.

"So I am," said Reginald. Gerard sat grave and silent. "Why shouldn't I be?" asked the little man. "I'm not Old Parr. And look here, Lumby, you can tell

me, perhaps, whether I have a chance." He looked guiltily at Gerard, and said, in a manner more than half aggressive, "It's your Cousin Milly."

"I can't tell," said Gerard. "Go and speak to her. You have my best wishes."

"It's horribly absurd, you know," said the little man. "Of course it's awfully absurd. I used to watch Va—Fellows I knew I used to watch, and I used to laugh at 'em no end. I never thought I should come to this," he added, indicating the bottles on the dressing-table; "but when a man's as far gone as I am he'll do anything to make himself feel a little worthier."

When a man gets to so pronounced a badinage as this concerning himself it is not easy for anything less than a hippopotamus to feel thin-skinned. Gerard saw that the little man was almost hysterical in his desire to hide himself, and sauntered away, therefore, with an aspect of carelessness, repeating his advice.

In a quarter of an hour Reginald descended, with no trace of his late pursuits about him; and seeking Milly, found her in the garden, plunged desperately into the question at his heart—and was rejected. She respected him—she liked him—she offered him a sister's affection. She let him down as gently as she could; and he went away sadly, threw all the preparations out of window, and grieved. He announced his departure that evening; and Gerard, of course, knew the cause of it, and was very sorry for the stanch friend and the brother of his dead love. Before Reginald went away, however, he spoke to Milly again.

"You're very good and tender-hearted," he said; "and when I'm gone you'll very likely accuse yourself of having made me miserable. Don't do that," he pleaded, stoutly. "I'm not going to pay myself the poor compliment of saying I don't care. Of course I care; but I don't know who it was just now, but there was a lady of whom somebody said that to know her was a liberal education. And I shall be a better fellow for it; and I'm very much obliged to you for putting it so kindly. Good-bye," he said, briskly; but the tears were in his eyes.

Mrs. Lumby spoke of his departure, and asked Gerard privately if he could divine what had driven Reginald away. He, thinking his mother innocent of the truth, respected

his friend's secret; but it was soon apparent that she knew it, and had but asked her question for an object of her own.

"Why has Milly refused so many offers?" she asked. "Is there nobody in the world will suit her, or is she in love with somebody already?"

Gerard was silent; but something in his mother's face and voice recalled to his mind the time when Milly had clung to him, begging him to abandon his purposed pursuit of his enemy. While he was thinking of this his mother returned to the charge.

"Can you guess who it may be, Gerard?"

There was that curious something in her face and voice again; but he was not of that tribe of dandies who are ready at any mere hint to believe a woman in love with them.

"Why should *I* guess?" he asked, as lightly as he could, and rising, made as if to leave the room.

His mother arose also and stood before him. "Can't you guess, Gerard?"

He stood a little awkwardly before her, and would have made any light answer serve to turn the question aside, if he could have found one. But none occurred to him. His mother's reiterated question seemed to point to him, and the remembrance he had in his mind gave him the same indication; but he was loath to accept it. To love and love's delights his heart was dead. Love is not so poor a thing in all hearts that a year or two can serve to bury it out of memory.

"Gerard," she said, seeing him silent, and perhaps mistaking the slight traces of confusion which declared themselves, "I have known it a long time. She began to care for you when—when your troubles began, dear."

"If it is so," he returned, "you should have kept her secret, mother."

"Oh," she cried, a little wounded, "you are not to think that Milly has spoken to me, or that she guesses that I know. But women see these things."

"I hope you are mistaken," answered Gerard; and having kissed her, left the room.

He was not a young man from whom caresses came lightly or often; and the kiss seemed to his mother to set a certain seal of solemnity upon his refusal. A day or two

later she began quietly to question Milly as to the reason of her manifold refusals of eligible young manhood.

"You don't want me to go away, do you, aunty?" asked the young lady; and the old one entered a warm disclaimer. "Let me stay with you," pleaded Milly. "I shall never marry," she added.

"Until the right man asks you," returned the old lady.

"Let us wait till he comes, dear aunt," said Milly, "before we say any more about it." So the question dropped, and was no more reverted to.

You remember, in the famous wooing of Duncan Gray, the sly Scottish brevity of humor with which the narrator sets forth the final causes which brought the young people together. Gerard, like Duncan, was "a lad o' grace;" but Milly's case was by no means piteous to look at. She seemed, on the contrary, to be very fairly happy; she was always good-tempered and cheerful; she made the old house bright with a sweet, equable brightness. Gerard began to bethink himself, what would it look like if she left it? His mother's revelation hung in his mind a good deal; he admitted that Milly would make an ideal wife for any man happy enough to win her. Yet there was no room in his heart for any new love. He watched her as she tended his father and warmed the old man's last dim years with a gentle and untiring love, like that of a good daughter. He watched her as she cheered his mother, and saw in her the only sunshine the house held within it in these gray days. He thought highly of her, and regarded her with what he felt as a deep, brotherly affection, but no more.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"I HAVE BEEN BLIND," SAID GERARD. "I HAVE LOVED HER THESE TWO YEARS PAST."

WHILE things were at this pass the new owner of the Grange, a handsome young bachelor, well provided with the good things of life, began to make advances, and was remarkably well received by Mrs. Lumby. Gerard's mother was one of those curiously unselfish women who find delight in others' happiness, and make no schemes for their own, and who are generally very happy in despite of

fortune, perhaps because of their own unselfishness. Gerard had liked the new neighbor well enough, to begin with; and though he was slower to make friendships now than he had ever been, he manifested a liking for Mr. Graham's society. But somehow—construe me this who will—he began suddenly to discern some wretched affectations in the man's manner. His whiskers offended him, for one thing, and he hated to see a man part his hair in the middle and wear an eyeglass. Curiously enough, the birth of these small mislikings was contemporaneous with a seeming desire on Mr. Graham's part to be a good deal at Lumby Hall, and to inveigle Milly into private talk, and to waylay her in a chance manner in her drives, walks and visits. A little coolness sprung up between Gerard and the new acquaintance, and once or twice Gerard greeted the casual mention of his name with chill ridicule of his smile—which was, perhaps, a little too frequent—or of his eyeglass, which was somewhat too transparently in the young gentleman's way. Mrs. Lumby, having favored his visits, and clearly discerned their object, was a little piqued.

"Gerard," she said, privately to him, "you do injustice to Mr. Graham. No man is altogether free of peculiarities; he is a gentleman; he is very good to the poor, and his character is unimpeachable."

The young fellow growled a little, admitting that all this might be true, but demanding to know what the gentleman in question saw to smirk at all day long.

"Lemonade is a very good drink in its way, no doubt," he said, with a reluctant laugh, "but you don't always want it. What is the fellow always here for? One gets tired of him."

"He is paying his addresses to Milly," said the excellent woman, with some warmth. "And you must not play the part of the dog in the manger, Gerard."

"What?" said he, with more briskness than was common in him. "Is she going to marry that fellow?"

He walked on a step or two, with a stronger feeling of dislike than ever for Mr. Graham.

"I can't say how far the matter has gone," said Mrs. Lumby, in answer. "But his intentions are evident, and I hope Milly will accept him. It is high time she was settled."

Gerard took this intimation with a worse grace than

might have been expected of him. He would at least have liked, he said, to see her married to a worthy man.

"Is there anybody worthier in the field?" demanded his mother.

To that query Milly's well-wisher returned no answer.

A day came when the contemned Graham came, with his smile, and after an interview with Milly went away without it. He stayed away for a month or two; and Gerard missed him so far that at last he sent him a note asking him to join in a day's shooting. The old coldness died, and the two, without developing an heroic friendship, got on very well as neighbors, and were pleasant acquaintances.

"You get on very well with Mr. Graham *now*, Gerard," said his mother, with an unkind emphasis on the "now."

"I like him better than I did," said the young man, with perfect calm. He was by this time a justice of the peace, noticeable for a judicial patience in his conduct of such cases as came before him. Among his compeers was one Staines, a middle-aged man, a widower, and a large landowner. This was the one man whom Gerard really esteemed of all the unpaid justices of the county, and he spoke of him with reserved warmth at home, and finally brought him to Lumby Hall pretty often. But Mr. Staines began to come of his own initiative. There was very little glass in the gardens of the Hall, and his conservatories were the finest in the whole country-side. He used to send melons, pines, grapes, and what not; and as for flowers, they began to bloom all the year round. The ill-regulated Gerard began to cool toward the admirable Staines, and Mrs. Lumby lost patience with him.

"Why have you quarreled with Mr. Staines?" she asked.

"We haven't quarreled," answered Gerard, quietly.

"You are not nearly so friendly as you were," persisted his mother; and then broke out with, "You are a dog in the manger, Gerard. You will neither marry Milly yourself nor let any man marry her."

"I don't want her to marry Staines, certainly," he said, with provoking calmness. "She mustn't be a nurse all her life. The man's five-and-forty, and has three children."

His mother sighed, and was fast giving him up as intractable. If Milly had only shown some favor to any one

of her wooers she would have had more hope That might stir him into action, she thought; and she even maneuvered to make it appear that the girl had a penchant for the widower; but without effect.

All these things took time, of course; and, indeed, four years had gone by since Val Strange had betrayed his friend. Many things which had at that time seemed impossible had come about. Gerard had forgiven his enemy. He had done more—he had saved his enemy's life in place of taking it. He had himself, after an awful repentance, settled down into peace of heart, or something very near it. And nearly all this time the thought had been in his mind —vaguely at first, but clearer and more clear as time went on—that the best woman he had ever known in his life loved him, and was to be had almost for the asking. Messrs. Graham and Staines had done something between them to open his eyes to his own condition. But it was natural that in a heart so loyal there should be much tenderness about disturbing the place of the dead. Consciously to admit a new love had something of an air of sacrilege about it; and on the other hand there was a baseness of coxcombry about the idea of marrying Milly out of pity for her attachment—as if she could not live without him. And, indeed, Milly seemed happy and contented amid the multifarious duties she laid upon herself, and looked by no means like the love-lorn maiden of the lending library. But as widower Staines grew more and more persevering in his presentations of fruit and flowers, and more exigent in his attendance at the Hall, Gerard at last became alive to the fact, that however romance might reject the notion, he had within him capacities for loving a second time. There were none of the old wild transports of passion in this calm affection; but it was none the less a marriageable love, and he saw it. I am not altogether sure that the volcanic nature of his first love had not imbued him with ideas about love and marriage in general which were hard to shake; and that finding none of the volcanic agencies at work, he declined to believe in the dictates of his own heart. But at last the Staines affair came to a head, and the middle-aged justice came up with a nervous smile, and went away without it. Then Gerard spoke.

Milly asked for time to think, and consulted his mother. "I am not going to be married out of pity," she said with

spirit in the course of the colloquy; and then, with sudden tenderness, threw herself upon Mrs. Lumby's bosom, a gentle avalanche, and asked, could she make him happy? The mother was sure of it—had seen it for a long time. "Speak to him of it," murmured Milly; "and tell me what he says, and how he says it."

Mrs. Lumby promised, and kept her promise. "I have been blind," said Gerard. "I have loved her these two years past."

That settled the matter; and the news of the result of the conference between mother and son being conveyed to Milly, she consented. They were married, and they lived in a calm blessedness and confidence in each other, enduring crosses and griefs and trials like other people. A year ago Gerard's father died, peacefully and happily, having lived to dandle an heir-male upon his knee, and to see a promise that the old house would be kept alive. The great firm prospers, and is higher in the world than ever; and Barnes still sits in the seat of Garling. Val Strange meets his old friend and enemy at times, and after all there is on each side a softened and tender esteem. The two know each other's temptations, and that is a great matter. Where storm raged calm reigns.

Good-bye, Val. Good-bye, Gerard. Good-bye Hiram. You are not the only dream-children I have had by many, but I have loved none so well and have parted from none so sadly. You are going out into a cold world, my lads, and will find nobody to love you as your father did.

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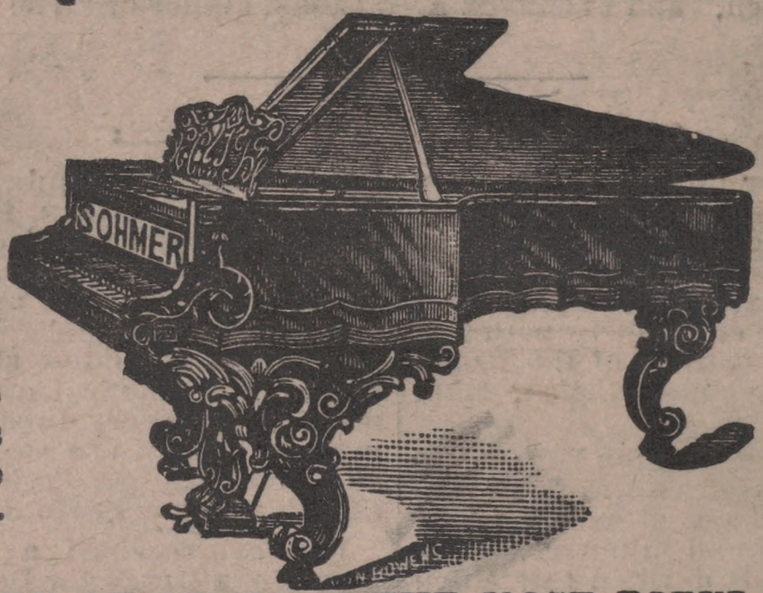
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